

THE FAIENCE VIOLIN



CHAMPFLEURY

Lebanon and
Montgomery
Counties.

Thomas,

True - true -

The Faience Violin

BY

CHAMPFLEURY

TRANSLATED BY

WILLIAM HENRY BISHOP

AUTHOR OF THE HOUSE OF A MERCHANT PRINCE, ETC.



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Preface.



CAN never forgive him," the sprightly Lady Mary Wortley Montagu says of Richardson the novelist, "his disrespect of old china, which is below nobody's taste since it has been the Duke of Argyle's, whose understanding has never been doubted either by his friends or his enemies." This taste has been shared by so many excellent people, both before that good lady's time and since, that it is rather a disparagement than otherwise to quote any particular name in its favor, be he duke or of even more exalted social position. It has accordingly produced a great number of treatises, dealing with the subject learnedly or garrulously, from the technical, historical, and artistic points of view, but, strangely enough, it remained for Champfleury to give it its first romance or

tale, and his performance, so far as I am aware, has not yet found its counterpart. He dismissed all the usual master-motives for the novel and found an original passion of human nature in the ardent zeal that drives the collector, not alone of old china, but of bric-a-brac in general—the collector, in fact—to every kind of comical and almost pathetic excesses.

Few could have been better qualified to speak with authority of this passion than Champfleury himself, for his natural bent inclined him to the eccentric, and he was an accomplished collector and a skilled writer on all such subjects. There is little doubt that he himself had been through most of the phases of the mania he so amusingly describes herein. He was forever looking up some remote half-forgotten individual or neglected corner of history. He aimed to restore to a better place in the public esteem the Le Nain Brothers, obscure painters of the time of Louis XIII. He wrote of the realistic painters of that date, and of the pastel-painter La Tour, and he wrote histories of Faience, of the Pottery of the Revolution, of the Hotel

Drouot, the great auctioneering mart of Paris, and of Ancient and Modern Caricature, and the People's Penny Prints. He was a favored observer of collectors, being for many years curator of the museum of the National Porcelain Manufactory of Sèvres. Born at Laon in 1821, he died in 1889, the assistant administrator of that renowned institution.

In early years, he lived on terms of close intimacy with Henri Mürger; they were young literary men together, but it has been said that, whereas Mürger merely sang of life, he studied it. Although he was hailed on his *début* by Victor Hugo as a strong accession to the romantic school, he speedily barred himself from the right to any further compliments of the sort. He had a pleasure in the accurate study of life and a keen sense of humor, which, in his numerous novels and sketches, made him a realist of a distinguished type, never confounded even with Balzac, also his contemporary. His principal qualities are thought to be his analysis and sense of humor. Bright and jolly as it is, Saint Beuve calls the little

story herein translated "a unique study in moral pathology." It is a pity that the same gift of humor were not commoner with the later school of French realists, for it might have spared us many of the enormities which have brought the term almost into disrepute.

Personally, Jules Fleury, or Champfleury, seems to have been of a most wilful independence of character. It harmed him somewhat with the professional makers of public opinion in his own day, and may be an element in accounting for the decline of his reputation to a point below that of many vastly the inferiors of this strong and original writer. His opinion of the proper way of conducting oneself, for instance, in the employ of a newspaper was this: "Make no concessions to anybody whatever. If your editor asks you for an article in favor of peace, give him one in favor of war, in case you feel like it, even if it sink his paper."

A friend of his once said that he should never be surprised to hear that Champfleury had invented a new way even of eating, drinking, sleeping, or getting mar-

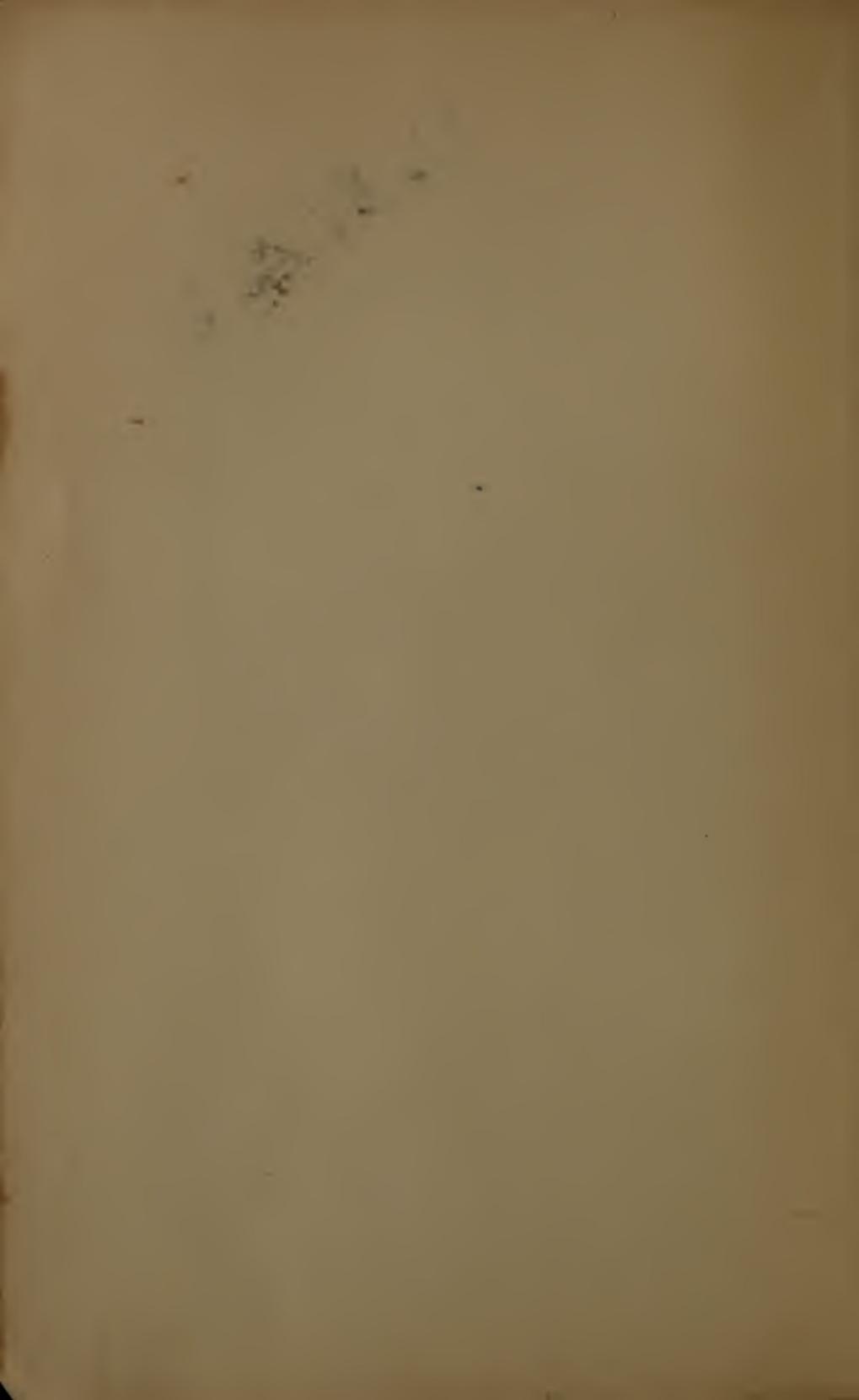
ried. He certainly did find an original method of making a marriage proposal. Having met, at an evening entertainment, a god-daughter of the painter Eugene Delacroix, he wrote her shortly afterward:

“If you, like myself, are of the opinion that an unmarried person is like one half of a pair of scissors lacking the other half, I have the honor to put myself at your complete disposition, in order that we may cut out the fabric of life together.”

The young woman laconically accepted, in the same spirit, by merely sending him a pair of scissors.

WILLIAM HENRY BISHOP.

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, NEW YORK CITY,
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C. E. A. S.

THE FAÏENCE VIOLIN.

CHAPTER I.

 AS there a single soul, down there at Nevers, who had not heard of Dalègre? I should rather fancy not.

He was one of the most pronounced types of the peculiar Nivernais temperament: he was a bright, jolly, sociable, little man, and wore the generous hues of the good wine of his country mantling in his cheeks, much as some good knight might wear the colors of his lady-love. He was one of the very best fellows in a town rather noted for good fellows. They took life comfortably, those Nivernais: they were a fine, hale, hearty, sensible lot, keen and shrewd enough in their talk, when it suited them, and enjoying a good

story with ample zest, even though it might chance to be a trifle spicy. They passed their days in merry yet prudent, fashion, and had not the least idea of using them all up at a sitting.

Dalègre's name, from his twentieth to his thirty-fifth year, was constantly on everybody's tongue. No fête in all the district round about was complete without him. He was one of the most accomplished of dancers, for instance, and never a good mother of a family, failed to ask her daughter, after the party, "Were you taken out by Mr. Dalègre?"

In this fashion, Dalègre was the cock of the walk, for a matter of fifteen years. Had he been ambitious, his career would have been more important still; but ambition had no part in his composition; he had early got drawn into the stream of idle pleasures, and he supinely continued to let himself drift with it, wherever it might lead. One day, however,—whatever brought it about—his everlasting routine of hunting-parties, dinners, balls, and receptions all at once palled upon him; he became aware that he was bored to death;

and so he suddenly dropped the whole thing, and took a little run up to Paris.

In Paris—an unlucky thing it was for him, too—he happened upon a certain old schoolmate of his, a man named Gardilanne, whose disposition was about as much unlike his own as one disposition could possibly be unlike another. Gardilanne, a Chief of Division in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, was a thin, wan, careworn, crusty valetudinarian.

Strangely enough, however, the two renewed their relations, and, thanks to the easily-adaptable character of Dalègre, got on quite well together. Dalègre was a person who could put up with almost any eccentricity whatever in his associates, provided they would only leave him undisturbed in his own habits and doings.

To give an example, Gardilanne took Dalègre to a restaurant to dine. He made no objection there to his friend's drinking a bottle of the best vintage there was, but, for his own private use, he pulled out a bit of a flask, containing a couple of fingers' depth of a particular kind of wine, the only sort his dyspeptic

stomach could support. Dinner over, again, he went home to bed, while Dalègre went to the theatre. The Head of Division had but one rule by which his infirm health was even measurably preserved. He must eat at regular hours, take food often, though little at a time, retire to bed promptly at nine o'clock, and allow himself neither wife, children, nor the indulgence of any of the usual passions. He felt bound to save himself excess and mental worry of every kind.

Dalègre was astonished at such a manner of life, and used to ask himself what enjoyment there was in Paris for a bachelor of forty, whose sole society consisted in a snaggle-toothed old housekeeper, coming in by day's work. He was convinced Gardilanne really had no passions. In this he proved himself but a mediocre observer, as the sequel of his stay in Paris taught him.

Every morning Gardilanne rose at six and took his frugal repast. Then, during three hours, whether it rained, snowed, hailed, or blew great guns, he would tramp the town, beginning at the Faubourg

Saint-Antoine and ending with the Quai Voltaire.

Gardilanne used to characterize himself as a being devoid of passions: in reality he was a most absolute slave of the passions. He was more eager than the keenest sportsman, more full of disquiet than the lover at his first rendezvous, more tormented than he could have been by ambition, more feverish than a gambler. His eyes had a trick of becoming as inflammable as those of a Corsican lying in wait for his enemy, as brilliant with desire as a gourmand's before the most tempting spread, and his hands as convulsive as those that hesitate over the last card, which is to give either fortune or total ruin.

No passions indeed? Gardilanne had them all, rolled into one—he was a collector.

Gardilanne dearly loved rich furniture and fine old pictures; it pleased him as much as a woman to delicately finger fine laces. India and Japan appeared to him in a vision of sacred elephants and fantastic dragons; Limoges enamels, rare etch-

ings in early proof states, ivories, and Venice glass disputed his admiration with sumptuous Oriental stuffs, Henri II. ware, miniatures, arms, snuff-boxes, carved chests, and altar-cupboards. He adored beyond measure every curious object of this character.

To satisfy his thirst for collecting, Gardilanne had grown miserly, even to the degree of misusing his own body without and within: he scrimped himself miserably in both food and clothing, in order to economize a few more poor sous daily, to toss into the maw of the all-devouring monster of Bric-a-brac.

At night, he could scarce be said to sleep; he dreamed an uninterrupted procession of objects more marvellous than the treasures of the Arabian Nights. Let him stand engrossed before some shop-window, his practised eye plunged into a heap of random rubbish in search of some bargain, some happy stroke of discovery, there, and lightning might have struck beside him on the pavement without his noticing it in the least.

No passions forsooth? Gardilanne could

have given odds in avidity to a cat watching a mouse. Who, to see him, with a countenance impassive as that of a judge, pricing old pharmacy-bottles in the stall of a retailer of such stuff, in the Rue Mouffetard,—who would have suspected, I say, that it was the frame of an armorial arm-chair instead, hooked up to the ceiling, that brought him there? He did not blush to give himself out for a dealer in broken glass, to get possession of an old chair in which great Condé had perchance reposed his illustrious bones.

No passions? Tell, then, what the meaning was of those deep furrows that seamed his countenance? What meant that yellow, uncanny, parchment-like skin, stretched so tightly over his high cheekbones? those hollow eyes, burning as with perpetual fever? those shoulders bowed by something more than mere years? that premature old age? Squalid poverty would scarce have reduced the Chief of Division to a more woe-begone plight. But three years the senior of Dalègre, he might readily have passed for his father,—and a very miser of a father at that, so

pinched and drawn were his features, so shabby was his attire.

Dalègre, who had lost sight of him till now, since their college days, found him decidedly aged, but naturally made no observation of the sort, such observations being wont to be badly received. He was quite overpowered by the multitude of valuable objects that filled his friend's apartment; it was so heaped up with wonders of every kind that it might have passed for a treasure-room of the Queen of Sheba.

Scarce a spot in the whole of it where one could safely put down the sole of his foot. You must look out how you managed your elbows, what you did with your hat; you must have a care over the most insignificant motions of your body. It was a museum in disorder, but there appeared, through all its lack of plan, glimpses of extraordinary richness.

And yet, Gardilanne's only source of revenue was a petty clerkship which paid him but a thousand dollars a year. Money, in his case, was replaced by patience, an indefatigable energy, a quite

unexampled keenness of scent, a diabolical astuteness. This last quality in particular availed him his undisputed supremacy among the whole tribe of collectors. Without it, all his patience, his energy, his insight, and his poor thousand dollars a year could never in the world have sufficed to get together the incomparable collection he boasted.

Gardilanne's secret—he took care not to tell his friend Dalègre—consisted in purveying to the tastes of other curiosity-hunters. Starting out betimes in the morning, as has been said, he would make a clean sweep among the dealers and take from them everything that he believed would be to the taste of this, that, or the other fancier, among his acquaintance. By dint of studying, comparing, and mastering the complex science of bric-a-brac, down to the ground, he had become the very best authority in all Paris to consult concerning a mark, a probable authorship, a genealogy, or the divers peregrinations of any object of art. He was capable of giving points to the keenest expert-appraiser; and the very best argument in

any disputed case was to cite the opinion of Gardilanne, who had come to be received almost as an official and final authority.

He discovered in the gutter articles of price, which he got for a song; and as in such matters knowledge is equivalent to capital, at the end of fifteen years he had amassed a vast quantity of objects of art. All of them were not at once in the mode, but by degrees he forced recognition for them, not only as rarities but as things of a real and peculiar value.

Thus Gardilanne was happy, happier even without a digestion than Dalègre at the finest banquet.

The visitor from Nevers admired in all sincerity the mass of splendor in the apartment, but he could by no means understand the complacent enjoyment of his friend, who, each time he entered his own doors anew, acted as if the gates of paradise had opened to him. Beginning at daybreak, Gardilanne would promenade his chilly, fireless chambers, casting an affectionate glance in turn at each of the objects which he felt he had snatched from destruction.

We conceive of the joy of a mother whose child has been rescued from death by a skilful physician. It was exactly the same rapture with Gardianne, the major part of whose curiosities had been found ruinously cracked and tattered, and rendered back to a second life and their original *éclat* and perfection.

In this manner, the childless bachelor had raised up for himself a family, for there was not an object in his collection that did not recall to him some long period of research, some profound combination, some deep-laid intrigue or veritable drama.

At times, Gardianne would even get up at night and go about, candle in hand, to appease the ardor of his curiosity and feast his eyes yet more upon some newly secured acquisition.

On awakening in the morning, new felicity! new transports! only to be compared to those of the miser, counting and recounting his gold. Gardianne united to his taste in art another kind of self-complacency which would make him exclaim at every opportunity:

"What is piled up here represents millions of money."

Money is the most evident form of material value, and perhaps Gardilanne came to estimate his collection in these gross terms, under the conviction that it was the only way to strike imposingly upon the ears of ignorant outsiders. He repeated the statement frequently to others, to himself, and to Dalègre, whose eyes it caused to open in great astonishment.

How a mere clerk on a thousand-dollar salary could have amassed millions was a problem Dalègre could not solve. He could not explain it any better after Gardilanne had invited him out one morning, on one of his foraging expeditions. The raid lasted not less than four hours, and Dalègre, used though he thought himself to all kinds of physical hardships, returned from it utterly broken down with fatigue. He, poor man, had not the burning passion for bric-a-brac to sustain him in these onerous labors.

This tearing through Paris, from one faubourg to another, had but mediocre interest for him, and once he could not

contain his open disgust—it was in a rag-picker's shop, in the Rue de l'Epée-du-Bois—when Gardilanne nosed out some fragments of ancient tapestry from under a conglomeration of rabbit-skins and old bones, which sent forth most vile odors.

Had Dalègre been observant, he would surely have studied with interest the unusual emotion of the man, his fevered eye, the tension of the nerves which would send the arm forward with spasmodic motions like those of a violinist. His hands assumed a harpy shape, which it needed nothing but the hooked talons to complete. He rummaged in the waste with the avidity of a miser and the coolness of a surgeon performing an unpleasant operation. He would rake with both hands at once, while his eyes, like those of a prowling detective, seemed to take a capacity to see at the same time in front, on both sides, and almost behind himself.

Dalègre was in no way interested in such wretched finds; he showed no interest whatever; he was bored to the last degree, and stood upon one leg and then upon the other, hardly daring to set

down his foot on the dirty floor of the dive.

There, in the miserable Rue de l'Epée-du-Bois, came back to him the laughing memory of the plains of his native province, and of the wild hares popping out of their burrows within easy range of his gun. He did not realize that Gardianne was possessed by exactly the same sportsman's passion as himself, except that it manifested itself in the different form of the chase after objects of art.

CHAPTER II.



HEN Dalègre was setting out for home, Gardilanne accosted him in this wise:—

“Are you well posted about your pottery, down there at Nevers?”

“No, I don’t know the first thing about it.”

“What!” with an impatient gesture of his shoulders, “you mean to say you live in a place where they make the loveliest ceramics in France, and you take no interest in them? Well; I’m sorry for you, that’s all.”

Dalègre smiled indifferently.

“Come here to-morrow morning early, and I’ll give you a first lesson in the subject,” continued Gardilanne. “It’s absolutely essential for a man with your opportunities to be a connoisseur in faïence. Faïence is the chief title to distinction your province has got.”

"And what good will it do me to become a connoisseur?" asked Dalègre, in whom the bump of local pride was but feebly developed.

"You won't be an ignoramus; it will do that much good at any rate."

"O! pooh! pooh!" mocked Dalègre.

But Gardilanne returned to the charge. He made his friend promise that he would try to learn something; and, at the same time, he disclosed to him his private idea.

"We greatly lack, here in Paris," said he, "fine specimens of Nevers. One reason is that, up to this time, arrogant Porcelain has carried it off against Faïence in general. But the day is at hand when faïence will triumph and get the better of its rival. I tell you there is going to be an upheaval in ceramic matters, comparable only to the Revolution of '89. Faïence represents the commoners, who at last demand their just rights; the fate of the overturned nobles is reserved for Porcelain. It will not be actually persecuted, it is true, but it will fall into oblivion. Nobody but rich parvenus will henceforth

seek that cold, heartless, supercilious material."

Dalègre did not get very much from the lesson; he concerned himself little about the declaration of the Third Estate, and the Abbé Sieyès' brochure had never aroused in him a spasm of generous enthusiasm. He was a man who simply meant to amuse himself. And yet he was a good friend, as he proceeded to show in the circumstances that followed.

Seeing that Gardilanne was really so eager for Nevers faïence, he tried to comprehend his directions, though he had the greatest difficulty in getting it into his head what was meant by the precise yellows, blues, and greens, which form the basis of the Nivernais decoration.

He listened vaguely to some historical account of the potteries of his district. Italian art-workmen had been brought to Nevers, by its reigning dukes, in the Sixteenth Century, and painted vases of great size.

While they talked, Gardilanne set before him, by way of object lesson, a precious example, a sort of ewer, with the arm

designed as twisted cords. What the Head of Division desired above all was "white upon blue." His only specimen of it at present was a glazed tile, from the palace of the Dukes of Nevers.

"An out-and-out miracle, this," he cried; "it rivals the *sopra bianco* of the Italian schools."

He trusted the marvel in the hands of Dalègre, who looked at it with about the same intelligent air as an owl at a blaze of fireworks.

"The day your potters did that, my dear Dalègre, they reached the height of the wonderful Chinese. It can't be beaten."

Dalègre made no reply, but continued to hold the enamelled brick and merely reflected that it was pretty heavy.

"Just look at its delicacy of finish, Gardilanne pursued, nettled at the indifferent air of his listener. "Remark how thick and yet at the same time how transparent its glaze. You see it, don't you? And what a feast to the eyes, those birds and flowers, in white relief!"

He grasped Dalègre's hand, at this point, with such an energetic pressure as if

he meant to force conviction into him by that means.

"Well! old fellow," he concluded, "there exist at Nevers great jars, ornamented in exactly the same style, of white upon blue."

If you should pick out some little, bare-footed peasant, who passed his time hunting birds'-nests, and put in his hands a text-book on geometry, you would hardly disconcert him more than Dalègre was disconcerted by the mysterious terms of "glaze" — "crackle-enamel" — "manganese" — "the Japanese influence" — "the Nevers school" — "white on blue" — and "*soprabianco*." It was an entirely new language for him, and, with all his efforts, he gathered nothing from this technical harangue but a bad headache. Have we not said he was simply a lover of pleasure; he had consistently put far from him, all his days, anything like study, serious observation or reflection. Gardilanne saw clearly that he was not yet fitted to partake in full of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, in these matters of pottery.

"On the whole, there is no need of your understanding the complete details," said he, "and I am wrong to muddle your brains with them. Just study attentively the few specimens I shall now show you, and try to hold on to the idea of how they look."

He brought out various pieces, one by one, and laid much stress at first upon their dimensions. Then he went on:

"A really good bit of pottery, nobly designed, has an unmistakable character, even to those ignorant of the art. Now, I want you to pick me up the small specimens, as well as the great, but direct your principal efforts to getting me some fine large dishes. There must certainly be some few still extant—a few that have come out of the fire without any cracks, swellings, or, as one might say, any left-handed work whatever."

Dalègre comprehended, in a way, this second lesson. The upshot was that he promised to look well about the country, during the coming autumn hunting-season, for what Gardilanne wanted. He departed, leaving the collector well con-

tent to have posted a sentinel, in his interest, in the heart of one of the most promising pottery-districts in all France.

CHAPTER III.



ITHIN a month, Gardilanne received from his friend a packing-case that as he pried off the cover made his heart beat tumultuously. Yes, Dalègre had not forgotten him; he sent him on a variety of faïence, two pieces of which were especially remarkable for their perfect state of preservation.

That very evening, he returned to Dalègre his enthusiastic certificate of connoisseurship of the first class. A vivid feeling of admiration and gratitude breathed from every line of his letter of thanks.

As Dalègre had handled the objects in question and they must remain pretty well fixed in his mind, Gardilanne thought good to unite with the rest some few further words of elucidation concerning them. He mentioned the approximate

dates, place of origin, the marks on the back, and other details which he trusted would stick in Dalègre's memory.

"Without doubt," he wrote, "the true lover of such things is born; still, the collector can be formed. The ewer that you have sent me would throw any of my rivals into a spasm of jealousy, while the faïence prayer-book is simply unique. That would take me straight to church, if I could only get the time. It's a hand-warmer for religious devotees, you know. They used to go to service carrying under their arms such imitation volumes as this, full of hot water. The mode dates from the Sixteenth Century, except that then, as wicked Rabelais has it, monks used to employ them as stomach-comforters; that is to say, they used to fill them with something good and strong to take a sly swig at occasionally. For my part, old friend, I shall put into it neither wine nor hot water; the mere sight of its glaze suffices to warm up my chilly blood. O Dalègre! *what a gift you have sent me!*

"I have put it up beside a small Byzantine shrine, which I deem it quite worthy

to offset, a marvellous religious relic though the latter is. While I am on this subject, let me suggest that it will be a good idea for you to search in the sacristies of your village churches. Luckily the rural priests know nothing about archæology. Scrutinize those dusky interiors well; would that my own eyes might become yours for the purpose! You will see some good old statuary, tapestries and wood-carvings, tossed into the waste-heap. I will gladly take such dilapidated truck from any church that will exchange it for a set of brand-new stations of the cross—a dozen of chromolithographs from the best house in the trade. Don't lose sight of this, do you hear? a dozen brand-new, colored pictures, in gilt frames, fresh and shiny. This will certainly be a useful string for you to pull with the good priests. How true that we have need of religion in all the circumstances of life!

"If by chance it should prove that there is nothing to be made in the churches, through I am positive of the contrary, then take a turn in the hospitals. *There*, my dear Dalègre, remains an almost un-

touched field. To judge by what their artists did for the pharmacies, the Italians must have esteemed the compounding of drugs as one of the most notable of the arts. I am told the sister-superiors of hospitals often had their likenesses on decorative medicine-jars. I have not personally verified it, but I feel that it is true. The French potters followed the Italians' lead. The manufactories of Luneville, Hagenau, and Niderwiller decorated druggists' outfitts complete. I get my weekly supply of magnesia at a little drug-store, in the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, which has a whole set of pots decorated in a design of Louis XVI. garlands hung round the necks of amiable symbolic serpents. Would you believe it? the man at that shop has refused me—me, so long his regular customer—a single one of those pots. I asked for but one, as a specimen of the art. Truly there are hard natures in this world of ours! *Can* such indifference, such cruelty, attend the pressing petitions of one engaged in an ennobling pursuit like mine?

" You will find sisters of charity much more tender-hearted. Withdrawn, by

their profession, from the vanities of this mundane sphere, they are as a rule unaware of the torments of the damned endured by collectors. Did they know of them, they would generously hasten to their relief, I am sure of it. Nevertheless, I think you will do well always to enter their dispensaries by chance, as it were. For instance, you may be wounded, while hunting, or may sprain your back or your ankle. A mere trifle will suffice to open you the doors of the hospital. Naturally, I don't wish to have your blood flow in my cause, but a disabled back or a dislocated ankle are simple things that one can always command. You ring, with the air of having been only just able to drag yourself to the bell-pull. They take you to the dispensary; the sisters all have remedies ready against such accidents. There you are, in the heart of the citadel. If there is no faience, your bruise disappears in a jiffy; is the dresser full of decorated jars, your sprain redoubles its gravity. They install you; they look after your hurts; and, with the medicine, be sure you take the receptacle that contains it.

"Grant now, my dear Dalègre, that I sketch out for you here the plan of a most interesting enterprise. Ah! if my duties didn't tie me down to Paris, I'd go and get myself nursed in all the hospitals of the Nivernais. I'd guarantee to get away, in that case, with a full cart-load of curious faïence.

"Well, well, how I let myself run on! but you, dear friend, are capable of understanding me. What better proof of it than the ewer that profiles its graceful shape before me, as I write, and your quite incomparable hot-water prayer-book, glazed as in a bath of the purest crystal? Good-by, for the moment! ten thousand thanks and again good-by!

"Yours most gratefully,

"GARDILANNE."

In such fashion, a year passed by. Dalègre acquired a certain amount of taste for this new kind of sportsmanship, and made four successive visits to Gardilanne, who did not fail to show all the warmth of his gratitude and to repay his services with a yet more ample supply of ceramic lore.

It was an odd circumstance in a sportsman like Dalègre, who had formerly kept all his fire for the chase of the roebuck and the wild boar, that he now never once forgot the commissions of Gardilanne, but ransacked the villages in the interest of his friend like some hardened campaigner bent upon pillage.

The occupation was a novel one for him, but, as we have said he was naturally obliging, it rather pleased him to further the simple enjoyment of Gardilanne, and he used to show the latter's letters to him about town with a touch of pride. For Gardilanne, the fountain-head of authority on ceramics, treated him as a most accomplished disciple, lavished upon him unmeasured flattery for his happy finds, and pronounced him a past-master and unexcelled judge in this peculiar science.

There are, alas! some innocent-seeming passions that act like the vine upon the oak. Taking only a weak hold at first, in time they grow and prosper, extend upward, and seize upon all the branches. Swarms of insects then make this their highway, and, in the end, the sturdy mon-

arch of the forest rots away and is dragged down in ruin.

Dalègre did not all at once remark the change in himself, how his enthusiasm in the chase of the stag and the lesser game had cooled, and how his eyes took, as it were, a permanent crockery lustre and reflected the brilliant ceramic colors that began to glow in the recesses of his heart.

It came to be a matter of supreme interest to him to explore every humble cottage. His eye unerringly sought the lowly dresser, where perchance he should happen upon some good bit, stranded from the sack of an ancestral chateau, in the great Revolution. Once he shipped off to Gardilanne, without paying heed to it himself, a jug with armorial blazonry that drew out two whole pages of rapture from the skilled collector. Ever afterward he was particularly on the lookout for similar blazoned table-ware. And all this he did with the more zest, since bargaining with the peasants demands a sort of diplomatic tact in which the denizen of the town is rarely the stronger.

So, little by little, Dalègre was possessed

of the mania that was ravaging Paris,—the Bric-a-brac Disease. Gardilanne had sown a seed of his own malady in Dalègre's nature. It had taken root, sprouted, and was soon to put forth dense foliage which would stifle all other thoughts and feelings.

CHAPTER IV.



T that time, there was at Nevers a firm of two brothers who used to get together any and all sorts of old rubbish that came in their way. They did not do this from the point of view of art, for they knew not the meaning of the word, but they simply had a craze for pitch-forking old things into their shop. If they were admitted to the house of any acquaintance, they rarely left it without carrying away some dilapidated trifle to add to the heap.

These Brothers Minoret had the veritable magpie taste for cramming their lofts with any article, no matter what, that had fallen out of use. Broken umbrellas, worm-eaten wooden panels, old snuffers, odd volumes of books, the other volumes of which were missing, rat-eaten family portraits, and objects of similar value were their stock in trade. This

greed was keen enough to have driven them to pick up fragments of nut-shells, if they thought these offered the carvers of such things sufficient surface for their craft. Breakage, wreck and ruin, the blight of moth and mildew were no drawback to them: the bare fact that a thing was ancient commanded from the Minoret Brothers an exaggerated reverence and a desire to treasure it up.

Naturally, a certain part of their omnium-gatherum consisted of scraps of Nivernais pottery. Dalègre found his way to their shop, and the man whom the brothers had never heard of except as a jolly boon companion, quite astonished them by the extent of his acquaintance with ceramics.

He took no pains to hide the source of his information, but admitted freely that it all came from Gardilanne. According as he sent his consignments, he said, Gardilanne wrote him some account of them, letting him into the mystery of their origin, process of manufacture, and a lot of other things to which no mere outsider could ever have attained. The Minrets

chose to pull long faces at his accurate scientific knowledge; it troubled them.

"What's the matter? am I wrong?" asked Dalègre, who was not at all conceited, and would have demanded nothing better than to be corrected in any mistakes he might make.

"No, but—you see——"

"What do I see?"

"If it's a fair question, how much do you get from Gardilanne for these things?"

"How much do I get? Why, I present them to him. He's a friend of mine."

"Yes, but—you know——"

"I suppose I am giving the old man a little pleasure; that's what *I* am up to."

"O yes, you give him a pleasure, there's no doubt about that. But—if I were you, I wouldn't trust those Parisians too far: they are an ungrateful lot."

"I'll show you Gardilanne's letters, and then you'll see that *he* is one who isn't."

"Your friend, the collector, pays you in fine words and laughs at you behind your back. To speak frankly, Monsieur Dalègre, it isn't at all the thing to ruin

one's own province, to suit the whim of a heartless Parisian."

"‘To ruin one’s own province?’ What do you mean?”

“Perhaps you are not aware of the talk going around town about you, but you really ought to know it, Mr. Dalègre. The other evening, at the Préfet’s, Judge Boscus—he collects faïence himself, you know—characterized you as a wrecker and a devastator of homes. How does that way of putting it strike you?”

“A devastator of homes?”

“The words seem harsh, yet they are just. Now, as even Judge Boscus’ lightest word has great currency in this town, which is only too ready to catch up any unpleasant epithet and make it its own, how would you like to be known henceforth, to the end of your days, as Dalègre the Devastator?”

“What an idea!” exclaimed Dalègre, much disturbed however.

He called to mind an old maid, named “Herminia,” who had once said some disagreeable thing about Judge Boscus, for which he had taken revenge by dubbing

her "Verminia." No subsequent ingratiating ways of the old demoiselle could ever rid her of the nickname. Herminia she was born, but, all the same, Verminia she died.

The Minoret pair observed Dalègre scratch his head in some perplexity, and they continued:

"Judge Boscus went on to say that if Mr. Dalègre were only collecting on his own account, that would be all very well, but to despoil one's native town of its treasures to send them away to a sordid speculator, who immediately puts them upon the market, was not the part of a loyal citizen."

"Gardilanne put his collection upon the market? Never! You don't know him."

"The Parisians are no lovers of permanence; they have no taste for conservatism. Judge Boscus says of them very happily, 'They change their rulers as often as their shirts.' No, a people who have no more attachment than the Parisians for their government, are not going to take any pains to keep together a collection of pottery."

The talk with these Minorets bore fruit, in throwing Dalègre into a very uncertain state of mind about Gardilanne. He had already notified the latter to look out for fresh consignments even more important than the preceding. His experience having now taught him the most promising spots for research, he had unearthed many fine specimens and was in course of obtaining them by all sorts of Machiavellian intrigues. But, smitten with a sudden dread of that public opinion which had always treated him heretofore as a kind of spoiled child of fortune, he thought it prudent first to pay a visit to Judge Boscus.

Strangely enough, the magistrate made no reference either to pottery or Gardilanne. Dalègre, like a man well posted in advance, awaited an accusation in due form, before putting in his defence. Out of a corner of his eye, meantime, he reconnoitred the room for the notable faïence with which the judge should have been surrounded. He intended to drop some appropriate remark thereanent, in which a repentant disposition should be

manifest. But Judge Boscus had no scrap nor sign of any collection in sight.

"Not thinking of getting married yet, eh?" the judge let fall, as his visitor was going away.

"Why, no, judge, I haven't thought of it much, up to the present time."

"Yet you make some bad devastation in the hearts of our pretty women, I hear."

"Devastation—devastation!" A nervous tremor shook the form of Dalègre. This was surely a covert allusion; they were getting pretty warm.

"I find my time about all taken up with pottery now," he observed, trusting the bait would take.

"Ah, yes, yes, just so," returned Judge Boscus, absently.

"I'm getting my house ready to accommodate quite a collection."

"A very good idea too, Mr. Dalègre."

"I'm afraid I've lived a rather vacant life in some respects, but now I propose to have this very definite object in view."

"I congratulate you on having found something so much to your liking."

"Cold, but polite," reflected Dalègre.

"He's too well-bred to let fly reproaches at me, but I can see that he still keeps his grudge in."

The notion of having made himself a mark to the hostility of so considerable a person harassed Dalègre, until he had thought up a form of remedy. He began to follow assiduously the sessions of the Police Court, and bring himself as much as possible to the notice of Judge Boscus, who presided over them.

During the speeches of counsel, Dalègre would affect to doze. He threw some very fine shades into his acting. While the prosecuting-attorney was speaking, he would affect to half-emerge from his doze. But when the judge began, and entered upon his summing up, O, then it was with wildly-distended eye and quivering nostril that Dalègre listened. He appeared to drink in every word falling from those prosy lips, as if it came from some most sacred fountain of healing.

No mere humor was this, but tragic earnest, to a man, used like himself to the unlimited freedom, fresh out-of-door air and sturdy tramping of a sportsman's

life. But the recollection of Herminia-Verminia seemed to make it a necessity.

Just beneath the court-room windows lay an esplanade, agreeably shaded by fine large trees. Dalègre mounted guard there many a long hour, hoping to catch Judge Boscus, come forth to refresh himself a bit from the fatigues of a sitting. In that case, meeting the magistrate as by accident, he meant to attempt his own vindication. Judge Boscus had not returned Dalègre's last visit, and this alone in a small town is equivalent to a declaration of war, and is a cause of hatreds and vendettas.

Never in all his days before had Dalègre's head been called upon to labor so hard. He felt his nature becoming all twisted and awry, like a district attorney's. No doubt the police-court cases at which he had assisted for three long months had impaired his capacity of seeing things in their proper relations. Tired to death of the tedious business, he resolved to go and plunge anew as into a fresh bath of distant, unspoiled nature. So off he went, happy to breathe free at last of the infec-

tious air of the court-room, which seemed to cling to his very clothing.

A sudden recollection of Gardilanne came to mind, and the souvenir seemed to bring him good luck. He halted one day, after a long morning's tramp, at a rural inn, and saw on its mantel an ancient faïence flagon in most cheery colors. Its blues, greens, and yellows intermingled in as pleasing a trio of hues as the tones mingle in some charming old minuet.

On the paunch of the jug, a couple of peasant women were seizing each other by the hair and cuffing each other well, the exhibition seeming to be given chiefly for the benefit of a huntsman in an apple-green coat, and his yellow dog, who were complacently looking on.

Various inscriptions lent their aid to the scheme of decoration—"Look out for your old chignon!"—"Ah would you then?—Take that, codfish head!" Such was the genial conversation in which the viragos were engaged,—paying no heed at all to the peaceable huntsman,—further embellished with a blue cap and lappets,—

who remarked "Stop it now, ladies! I wish you would."

Had circumstances been different, Dalègre's attention to this picture of popular manners might have been small. But, by some odd effect, as he gazed, the image of Gardilanne, which had been distinct at first, gradually faded, and gave place to that of Judge Boscus. The jug united itself mysteriously with the personality of the magistrate. It was an indication and a guide, like fresh deer-tracks on moist ground.

Dalègre followed the trace.

Judge Boscus, he argued, having passed upon a multitude of female disputes of that kind in his court, would understand and value the flagon more than anybody else, and would appreciate the delicate attention from any fellow-citizen who might present it to him for a part of his collection.

That very evening, he sent it round to the magistrate's, without, however, any accompanying message.

"I'll attend the next sitting of the court and see what effect it has produced," he said.

So, next day he was on hand in court. The judge ascended to his chair and at once pronounced a sentence that Dalègre thought particularly severe. The jug seemed to have exerted no humanizing influence whatever.

Without doubt, too, the judge must have recognized Dalègre, who had taken pains to post himself in one of the most conspicuous positions, but no significant glance or other sign showed his sense of gratitude for the gift that had been offered to august justice in his person.

Dalègre was most uneasy, and could now think of no further way to patch up his broken relations with Boscus. But, some little time after, he had a difficulty with one of his farmers, who was behind-hand with the rent. Fortunately for his purposes, he had been irritated, that day, till he was in one of those furious moods to which the most genial of dispositions sometimes yield. The peasant flew out at him in return with such a lack of respect that the only remaining recourse was the tribunal of justice. An easy, natural occasion was thus presented for seeing

the judge. Dalègre called on him, and began by making excuses for the impropriety of having sent a gift to a magistrate who was now to preside over his own case.

"Was it you who sent me this canteen?" asked the judge. "With what object?"

"I wished to add a trifle to the collection of one for whom I have a most profound esteem."

"'Collection?' *I* have no collection," exclaimed Judge Boscus.

Then, at last, Dalègre perceived that he had been simply duped by the Minoret Brothers. That wily pair of dealers had laid snares for him, to stop his curiosity hunting.

But it was now too late to check the rising tide: at that hour Dalègre himself had become a fanatical collector. He heard an interior voice that bade him sacrifice Gardilanne: to his mental eye, the Parisian appeared, as in a magic mirror, with nature distorted: he saw him working with might and main to deprave yet further the bad instincts of the denizens of the capital.

On the other hand too, he felt himself

urged on by his own self-love. His intimate knowledge of pottery now naturally tended to find expression in the creation of something like a private museum at his home. Such a museum would benefit the city, by drawing visitors from afar to see it; and no doubt it would insure to him the honor of a special mention in the Annual Directory of the department. Thus men find a thousand specious reasons at their disposition to warrant them in yielding to their passions, withdrawing a sacred pledge, throwing over a cherished intimacy or sacrificing the interests of their dearest friend.

CHAPTER V.



HREE months rolled by. Gardilanne, astonished at getting nothing more from Dalègre, wrote him letter after letter, to reawaken his zeal.

"Is the region wholly exhausted?" he asked. "It cannot be."

The question struck upon Dalègre's imagination with peculiar force, and prompted him to one of those tricks that are not uncommon among collectors.

The region was so far from being exhausted that faïence seemed to spring out of the very ground. The word had been passed along the line, and there was scarce a day that some peasant did not bring in to Dalègre a capital bit. He bought them all at a rather generous price and put them away, in the well-known confidence of many collectors that he was placing his money at a most promising interest.

In the whole were some pieces of no great importance, ordinary popular faïence, that had crept in among the rest by oversight. Dalègre sorted out his belongings, made two lots of them, and sent off the poorer one to Gardilanne.

Gardilanne opened the box with a feverish anxiety, unpacked its contents with painstaking care, and—made a wretched grimace at the paltry stuff that presented itself to his gaze. Set a coarse, garlic-flavored stew before a *gourmet* pampered on the most delicate viands, and you will have some idea of the disappointing effect. He felt obliged to put a good face upon it, however; he must not show his disgust. He thanked the sender for having kept him in mind, trusted that the future held yet more important discoveries for them, and begged Dalègre to continue to do the best he could for him.

"Mr. du Sommerard," he added, "informs me of the existence of a crockery violin, described to him by some venerable resident of Nevers. The singular piece must be entirely unique in ceramics. Have you ever heard of it? Bestir

yourself about it, I beg, for the pure love of art. I must confess to you that the revelation of a faïence violin robbed me of my sleep all one night. I seemed to hear Paganini himself drawing tones from it as clear and limpid as its own pellucid enamel. Talk about this crockery violin everywhere, dear friend. Stir up the old inhabitants of the country; get their rusty memories working. If such a wonderful violin exists, you are the very man to find it; you *will* find it."

But Dalègre had now become more perfidious than Iago.

"O, yes, I'll play you a tune on your crockery fiddle," he exclaimed; "never fear."

He at once indited a letter, in a most plausible, hypocritical tone, regretting extremely that the last consignment should have consisted of things of such little value; he had sent it more as a proof of good will than anything else. Coming down to the faïence violin, he said he had never heard it spoken of. What he had heard of, however, were some remarkable music-plates—late Seventeenth Century

work—with pastoral ditties upon them, set to bars of plain-song. They were in the collection of a private individual, but unluckily this private individual was “a regular pig,” who would never let a soul into his place to see them.

Dalègre might well speak with feeling of these plates, for he had a couple of them for his own,—beauties, one decorated with a drinking-song, the other with a pastoral ballad and Mondoville’s music.

Whenever the Nivernais looked at them, he laughed in his sleeve at the capital joke he was playing on the all-unconscious Gardilanne. The pupil was the more proud of his smartness for taking in his very master; he was like those vainglorious apostles who throw off the yoke of a religion they have long been zealously serving, and set up a new one for themselves.

Dalègre rubbed his hands with unconcealed satisfaction, as he paced his study, which was enriched daily with new pieces of rare and curious faïence. What a fool he thought himself to have ever sent anything of consequence to Paris! But, in every field of knowledge, after all, he phi-

losophized, wisdom is only bought at the price of sacrifice. It was Gardilanne who had made him acquire his education. Should he ever have known a thing of the surpassing charm of ceramics had he not ferreted out the specimens, bargained for them, held and caressed them in his own hands—all for another?

Meanwhile, he began to bestir himself actively about the latest idea of Gardilanne's, the crockery fiddle; he rarely let a day go by, now, that he did not ask the inhabitants of Nevers or the environs if they had ever known of that remarkable instrument.

Some of the listeners took it merely as his joke; others thought it a real pity that a man like him should let such nonsensical chimeras turn his brain. But Dalègre threw himself into his pursuit with all the vigor of a strong man of thirty-five who feels that he grasps a solid reality at last, after having run through the list of idle pleasures; he was disconcerted by no failure, went on with his prying investigations, continued his imperturbable line of questioning, and did

not concern himself in the least as to what opinion was entertained of him.

He fell in, at length, with one of the oldest "clay-kneaders" of the place, one of the men who had longest plied the trade of making its peculiar pottery.

"I have no personal knowledge of any faience violin," stated this venerable potter, "but, at the same time, I do not deny that there may have been such a thing. If there was, it must have been a *tour de force*, one of those masterpieces that the best workmen used to make just to show their manual skill."

"Ah-ha!" commented Dalègre with satisfaction.

"But, of course, it's going to be no easy job for you to get hold of a piece like that, probably unique in its kind," the potter concluded.

But Dalègre was well content with the upshot of this interview: at last he had found a person who did not put the very existence of his faience violin in doubt.

To relieve his mind a trifle, he thought good to let Gardilanne know the result of his talk with the workman. And then,

pursuing his system of Machiavellian deceit, he forwarded him a second supply of rubbish. The stuff was of no account at the best, and, in the next place it was all chipped and cracked, or broken and badly mended. It was just a lot of refuse scraps and fragments, and the sender was confident that it would put a stop, once for all, to Gardilanne's importunate demands.

CHAPTER VI.



HOUGH he was really not bad at heart, Dalègre laughed to himself in scornful glee, as he pictured the crestfallen air of Gardilanne on opening this present. Collecting is an excitant to unscrupulous selfishness, and the once open, generous nature of Dalègre was becoming stained through and through with the sombre hues of the characteristic vice.

In the lapse of another week, however, he experienced a certain amount of compunction for what he had done—moved thereto by his failure to receive any word from Gardilanne, who was usually so polite. Had he at last realized the trick and the fact that he had a rival? Were his feelings irreparably hurt, the poor dear old chap?

Thanks to a few worthless bits of crockery, coarsely patched with iron wire, he

had lost for good one of those sincere friendships which are too rare in this world to be lightly tossed away. It became an earnest inquiry with him what to do to smooth down the ruffled temper of Gardilanne, if anything were still possible. The days passed and still no acknowledgment. Of course not. Gardilanne was hopelessly offended and how could any be expected? Dalègre's efforts to forget the broken friendship were unavailing, and he went about with a definite burden of remorse on his conscience.

All this did not prevent him from continuing his explorations, both in town and country. He won the appellation of "Dalègre, the Pottery-crank," though it is possible that this was applied to him somewhat to distinguish him from the various other Dalègres rather than in depreciation.

One certain evening, on his return from his pottery-hunting, with a full game-bag, old Marguerite, his servant, accosted him with,

"I forgot to give Monsieur this letter, which came by the morning's mail."

"Time enough for letters; no hurry,

eh?" he replied absently, far more interested in marshalling the treasures he had brought home, in harmonious arrangement on the shelves of an *étagère*, than in anything else whatever. He proposed to regale his eyes on them during supper.

"There now—very good!" he cried, drawing back to contemplate the effect, "very good indeed! How does it strike you, old Marguerite? Anything the matter with that, eh?"

"You know I'm no judge of such things, sir."

"I'll tell you what, you're jealous, Marguerite," he said jocosely. "You'd give your eye-teeth to have some plates like that in your kitchen; you know you would."

She shrugged her shoulders, and said, with indulgent disdain, "To think that people can spend their money on such like fooleries!"

"Shut up, you consummate old idiot!" roared her master, more in apparent than real severity, however.

"Monsieur knows very well that I make no pretensions to be a scholar," she returned.

"Pretty sort of talk that; 'fooleries' indeed?" muttered Dalègre, pacing the floor, while the domestic put his supper on the table. It appeared that her words still rankled.

"All I mean is that folks where I came from prefer porcelain to faïence," she returned humbly.

"They are asses, then, those peasant-folk of yours. Their opinions don't prevent them from asking me a big price when they want to sell me their tableware, I notice."

He now fell to upon his supper, with an appetite sharpened not less by his satisfaction with the result of the day's work than the active exercise he had taken, in beating the country-side.

"Your letter, sir," said Marguerite, again deferentially offering it to him.

"O, yes, to be sure; let me have it."

"From Gardilanne," he commented, as he took it. "He deigns at last to answer. Well, I suppose it's all a tirade of abuse. Not a doubt but what it is."

He began to turn the missive in his hands, without opening it, studied the address, and the like, as if the exterior

appearance could somehow acquaint him with what its contents might be.

"The sort of thing he has probably written will spoil my appetite for supper," he soliloquized. "No doubt he just everlastingly pours out upon me all his vials of wrath and contempt."

"Aren't you going to read Monsieur Gardilanne's letter, I'd like to know?" interposed Marguerite, availing herself of the license of an old servitor who had brought him up, from babyhood.

"Pretty soon, Marguerite. I fear that —perhaps——"

"Do you think poor Monsieur Gardilanne has met with some accident?"

"Why don't *you* know how to read, Marguerite? do you know it's very stupid of you?" he responded irrelevantly, helping himself at the same time to a liberal slice of game-pie.

"It was my parents' fault: they did not send me to school. I'm ashamed of it almost every day of my life."

"Because, if you knew how to read," he went on, "I would have had you read the letter first."

"Me! me read your letter first?"

She was greatly touched by this proof of his confidence.

"Yes, and if you had found anything peculiarly painful in it, you could have broken it to me by degrees, you know."

"My nerves are all in a tremble with dreadful ideas. If it were me, I shouldn't wait first to count a hundred nor even ten; I should just open it and see the worst at once—Here! now read it quick!"

And, for once overstepping even her liberal margin of indulgence, she hastily tore off the envelope and offered the open letter to the astonished gaze of its owner.

Dalègre, plying his fork with one hand and holding up the letter in the other, tucked away a good mouthful of the game-pie, and let his eyes wander vaguely over the lines.

"Ah!—oh!—oh!—help!" he suddenly cried, in utter consternation, while his fork fell from his nerveless hand with a clatter.

"What is the matter? O! what is the matter?"

"Marguerite! I am lost," he cried, springing up from his seat at the table.

In the twinkling of an eye, he was at the sideboard, stripping off the specimens of pottery from its shelves.

"Quick! Marguerite," he shouted. "Hide me this!—and this!—and this! Hustle them out of sight as fast as you can!"

He snatched down, too, all the plates from the wall, and even pulled out the nails, which might have betrayed that they had hung there.

"What shall I do?" he cried distractedly.
"In heaven's name what shall I do?"

Next, seizing a candle, he darted upstairs on a run.

"The blue room is cram-full," he moaned woefully.

"Full of what, Monsieur Dalègre?" demanded the servant, following him, in stupefaction.

In the chamber, Dalègre heaved a heart-rending sigh.

"We can never in the world get the stuff out of his way. Marguerite, what time is it?"

"Just ten: I just heard the kitchen-clock strike."

"Impossible! impossible! not to be thought of," he cried, and began, like one beside himself, to tear about the house, from the blue room down to the parlor, from the parlor to his study, and thence back to the blue room again, casting glances of dismay on every side, as he went.

"But Monsieur Dalègre! but, Monsieur!" expostulated the old woman, to whom he had not yet vouchsafed a syllable of explanation.

"Marguerite," he cried, suddenly stopping short, "Gardilanne is coming to Nevers."

"And that upsets you so? How glad I shall be, for my part, to see Monsieur's most valued friend again."

"I tell you I am lost, Marguerite, lost! lost!"

"Monsieur would almost make one think he had committed a crime."

"Why didn't you give me that accursed letter this morning?"

"Monsieur was just starting out on his search for the old broken pottery, and I—I—er forgot."

"O, this pottery! this pottery!" vocifer-

ated Dalègre, in despair. "Gardilanne must never suspect that I've got it. He would not forgive me, to his dying day."

"Why does Monsieur wish to conceal it from his friend?"

"Have I got time to stop here and deliver a lecture? Jump! fly! I tell you. In half an hour he'll arrive. Every scrap of faïence must have disappeared before that time."

"All these vases and plaques? Why, there's enough to make two wagon-loads."

"Don't leave a scrap in sight, not an atom."

"But the stage-coach will be on the Place in twenty minutes."

"Hustle! jump, I tell you!"

"O, deary me! deary me! where shall I ever make a beginning?" lamented the old woman.

"Clean out the blue room first: Gardilanne will sleep there. Quick, now! not a second to lose."

"And where shall I put the things?"

"Anywhere, anywhere, it doesn't make the slightest difference." Dalègre made a successful effort over himself, recovered

a measure of his self-control, stripped, then rearranged, the blue room and conveyed its contents to the parlor. Under no pretext was Gardianne, on the evening of his arrival, to be allowed to enter the parlor or other of the rooms where any of the objects of art were in sight.

At night, when, wearied, as it was to be hoped he would be, with the unusual fatigues of his journey, he was sunk in slumber, Dalègre proposed, with Marguerite, to stow all the compromising faïence securely away in the cellar. He made his servant swear to him, on pain of instant dismissal, never to reveal the secret to any one.

"It will give me a fit of sickness," old Marguerite grumbled to herself; "that will be the upshot of it all." From the beginning of her master's craze for pottery, she had been burdened with very heavy extra labors.

CHAPTER VII.



O the instant, came the expected ring at the bell. Dalègre rushed to the door and received Gardilanne, who threw himself into his arms with unaffected cordiality. The host, restrained by some scruples of conscience, managed to turn his head aside, and avoid giving what he would have esteemed a Judas kiss.

“Dumfounded to see me, old man, eh? Now own up?” was the new arrival’s manner of salutation.

“I—er only got your letter about an hour ago—By the way, have you had anything to eat?” was the elusive response.

“I wouldn’t mind taking a bite, if it’s all quite convenient,” Gardilanne admitted. Then, when he was installed at table, he explained:

“I have arranged at last to have three months’ leave of absence every year. My

collection does me this good turn. It got to the ears of my chief superior, the Minister, and he has been to look at it in person. Now then, my leave entails the mission of making a tour through all our provinces where different artistic industries have flourished from time to time, and seeing what additional information I can find about them. It occurred to me to begin with Nevers. I do this mainly on your account, my dear friend: I wanted to come and thank you as soon as possible for the great amount of valuable material you have so kindly contributed to my collection."

"The last lot was dreadfully poor," stammered Dalègre, in embarrassment.

"Not at all: on the contrary, it was a most excellent one. Now that we get right down to business," confidentially, "it is more than anything else that brings me here to-day. Do you know you sent me a perfect jewel?"

"A jewel? A—er, you mean—er——?"

"Yes, I could not characterize it by any weaker word. It is a piece dated here and signed by the man who was the

very strongest of all the Italian potters imported by the Duke of Nevers."

"Ah, indeed?" said Dalègre coldly, beginning to be afflicted with a retrospective pain.

"The find is simply astonishing, wonderful, marvellous. Shake hands on it again, old fellow! I insist upon having the very warmest shake of your hand."

Dalègre reluctantly put forth his palm, moist with agitation, to meet the enthusiastic grasp of the other.

"It made a sensation in Paris, nothing less. I consider it beyond all question the finest thing I've got. The rest of your consignment was of slighter interest, to be sure, but a single specimen such as that ranks you as a connoisseur of the first force and, I need hardly say, a friend of the most genuine and delicate sympathy."

"Sympathy? O, heavens!" Dalègre could but vent his feelings in a doleful mental groan.

"I'm not an ungrateful person, when anybody does me a good turn, and so you'll find. When you come to Paris I'm sure

you'll be glad to see a placard above your beautiful contribution,—as a slight recognition of your share in the matter—inscribed '*Presented by my excellent friend, Dalègre, of Nevers.*'"

"Can I congratulate myself half enough," reflected Dalègre, "on having put my collection out of the reach of such a man?"

Supper being over, "To-morrow," comfortably proposed Gardilanne, "we'll beat a grand battue in the town."

Dalègre could not restrain a shiver at the idea.

"There's not a thing left in Nevers," he objected.

"What, not even among your dealers!"

"We have no regular dealers, unless you might call Bara, the hatter, one. He tries to keep, with his merchandise, some few scrappy curiosities—but nothing of the least account."

"And your private collections?"

"Yes, I was going to tell you about that; it's something there's an entire lack of here: we have no private collections."

"But, if I'm not mistaken, you men-

tioned, in one of your letters, a person who had some very fine music-plates?"

"O! O, yes! that's so; it slipped my mind.—But he is dead," he hastily added, plunging all over, at last, into the lamentable course of Ananias and Sapphira.

"Good! ejaculated Gardilanne cheerfully, "then his collection will be for sale."

"I—I hardly think so. It went to his heirs."

"And, naturally, they will have no use for it.—Who are these heirs, by the way?"

Had Dalègre wanted to establish an alibi, to clear himself of a charge of murder, he could hardly have been put worse to his trumps.

"I am not acquainted with the heirs," he stated. "All I know is that they carried away all the personal property with them."

"We can learn their address. There must be some attorney charged with their affairs."

"Perhaps. The persons themselves, not belonging in these parts, left, the moment

the estate was settled.—I hear their home is some remote mountain village of the Pyrenees."

"And you let them go? You let a lot of country-bumpkins carry away precious faïence like that?—But I forget; you are not a collector."

Dalègre breathed again. It was evident that no suspicion had as yet poisoned the mind of his friend.

"You'll be able to give me a few minutes to-morrow, to go through your city Museum of Ceramics, at any rate?" Gar-dilanne suggested.

"Pooh! it's pretty thin sort of a museum."

"I was told in Paris, on the contrary, that it was rather a good one."

"You're frantic enthusiasts, all you Parisians.—But don't you find yourself tired out with your long journey?"

"No, I could sit up and talk faïence with you, all night."

"Let me at least show you your room," and Dalègre, rising, indicated that in his opinion it was high time they went to bed.

"Good-night! and sound sleep!" he said, as they were at the door of the blue room.

"To think that I am really in Nevers," said his guest, quite disregarding this, and he dropped into a chair in leisurely fashion inviting further conversation.

"Yes,—*good-night!*"

"Sit down a minute, do! Can we see the Ducal Palace from here?"

"No, my house faces the other way."

"Too bad! I'd like to have my first waking thoughts drawn to the abode of those fine old Gonzagas, who endowed France with pottery. By the way, your servant seems a very good sort of woman."

Dalègre could not see what possible connection there was between old Marguerite and the dukes of Nevers.

"I don't know as I have much fault to find with her," he rejoined.

"Does she belong around here?"

"She was born at Ligny-le-Châtel, I believe."

"What! O, my dear old friend, what luck was it that brought me here! I fall in, on the instant of my arrival, with a

native of Ligny-le-Châtel!—Why, I had put a big red mark against that place on my chart, to take special information about it. I'll just get out my chart now and show you."

Despite Dalègre's protest that the hour was late and it was not necessary, he unstrapped his trunk and brought forth a large map, which he spread out upon a table.

"All these places I've checked in red," said he, "were at one time or another the sites of pottery-manufacturing. Here's Ligny-le-Châtel. A pottery was established there as far back as 1780. The district is certain to have some curious bits of the ware, hidden away in the houses.—Would you mind letting me have Marguerite up here for a few minutes?"

"Marguerite is in bed and asleep long since."

"Heigh-ho! it seems to me pretty much all you people do is to go to bed and sleep." The visitor rose from his arm-chair and paced the floor. "Well, send me old Marguerite the first thing in the morning, any way," he said, pausing. "There

are certain matters I want to talk to her about."

Dalègre quaked. "She could not answer you," he said: "haven't you noticed that she is deaf."

"Deaf? You surprise me. One would never have suspected such an infirmity from anything in her looks."

"Yes, I couldn't keep the poor creature except out of feelings of humanity. What is worse, she is of limited intelligence, she knows nothing, for instance, about pottery. I only wish you could see the disdain she shows sometimes when I exhibit to her the finest specimens I bring in from my—I—a—ah!" He broke off in rage and disgust, having almost betrayed himself.

Gardilanne eyed him in astonishment.

"I—er—mean, of course, the specimens I bring in for *you*," Dalègre stammered, twisting the corners of his mouth all out of shape with the effort.

"I shall take in Ligny-le-Châtel, on my return journey, nevertheless," said Gardilanne. "I could not afford to miss it."

"Then, my dear and most welcome guest, this time, *positively*, good-night!"

He listened awhile, however, on the landing without, to the slight noises made by Gardilanne in moving about his chamber; and in truth did not finally retire till the strip of brightness, nailed, as it were, along the bottom of the door, had gone out, with the extinction of the candle.

He felt his peril imminent, and decided upon a course of action. Summoning Marguerite at once, he said to her:

"Gardilanne is going to ask for you in the morning."

"What will he take for his breakfast?" thinking this the matter at issue.

"He will take the fresh air."

"What! not even a cup of coffee?"

"Never mind that! I'll attend to those trifling details.—What I want to say to you is, that when Gardilanne addresses you, you must not make him any reply."

Marguerite listened in undisguised astonishment.

"If he makes signs for what he wants, you will wait upon him; but, if he speaks, you will affect not to hear him."

"One might as well be deaf and dumb at once."

"That's it—that's just what you must be, deaf and dumb."

Old Marguerite looked at her master with the expression of the victim of some sorcerer who is stupefying her with evil spells. Involuntarily, she put up both hands to her ears.

"You're a natural chatterbox, I know. Very well, then, in the evening you shall confab with me, all you like. Now, I want you to keep the closest watch upon Gardilanne. Note every slightest motion, every step, every gesture; see what he holds in his hands; what he has got in his pockets. But don't once open your lips to utter a word. Be sure you have an indifferent air too, as if you were not attending to what he does. He must never mistrust that he is watched."

Marguerite's old brain fairly reeled with dizzy speculations, no likeness to which had ever entered it before. Dalègre was pleased to increase her mystification to the utmost.

"An utterly ruthless nature, that Gar-

dilanne," he said; "he has the darkest designs upon my happiness, and he would even rob me of my few poor belongings. How does he repay the hospitality I have so guilelessly offered him? By bringing the direst anxieties and alarms into this peaceful home, where, before his coming, I lived so contentedly with my good Marguerite. A being, shall I not say at once a villain? who would despoil all the Nivernais and Burgundy for his own nefarious ends. But we shall check him yet; he shall find his match in us, shall he not, my brave Marguerite?"

"Yes indeed," she responded. She had begun to look upon Gardilanne with an utter detestation.

"Now, to-morrow, my child," her employer pursued cajolingly, "let it be your first thought, when you awake, that you are as deaf as a post. Bear it in mind; and bear in mind too that all your poor master's future tranquillity of mind depends upon it."

This settled for the morrow, he had his humble abetter follow him to the parlor, where the faïence, precipitately swept from

the dining-room, was all scattered about hap-hazard. Each took a large basket and, beginning with the principal pieces, set to packing the precious wares, and these were then conveyed to the cellar, far out of reach of all danger from the prying eyes of Gardilanne.

With a thousand precautions against being heard, master and maid toiled laboriously up and down the cellar-stairs and up and down again and yet again, like midnight burglars stealthily pillaging the house.

Dalègre was attacked by a peculiar tremor of the nerves. The muscles of his legs in particular, unstrung by the excessive amount of tip-toeing his great prudence suggested, and never having been made accomplices before in any such unworthy actions, seemed to have formed a contemptuous opinion of the whole affair and they refused their co-operation to the weak and flabby limbs.

Conscience-smitten, he feared that Providence was going to chastise his guilt by letting him fall downstairs from top to bottom, with a load of his finest plates,

which he had already been at such infinite pains to save intact in their various peregrinations about the country. Nor could he wholly stifle that characteristic clicking together of crockery, which compromising sound, if it ever reached to the ears of Gardilanne, would awaken him better than a clap of thunder. It is a trait of collectors, as of misers, that they are notably light sleepers.

At intervals Dalègre would go and put his ear to the door of the blue room, to make sure that its inmate did not stir. He felt that after this he should never dare hold up his head again even before old Marguerite, who, alas! until now had always respected him as the most high-minded of masters.

The hiding away of the pottery was not completed till three in the morning. When it was finally over, Dalègre threw himself on his bed utterly exhausted by fatigue and the violent emotions through which he had passed—emotions of which he would never have deemed himself capable. The zest in his peculiar property had been intensified in him by the coming of

Gardilanne, in a way that resembled possession by an evil spirit. He was, all at the same time, touched in his self-love, preyed upon by jealousy, envious of the superior artistic hoard of Gardilanne, and chagrined beyond measure to have unwittingly sent him a valuable piece of faïence in the crate of rubbish.

Numerous speculations pressed upon him as to the immediate future. To what limit was Gardilanne likely to protract his stay? In what congeries of perils and complications would not the visit inevitably involve him, the luckless host?

The slightest stroll Gardilanne might take in town must acquaint him with the fatal truth, namely, that Dalègre too was a collector and possessed important accumulations of his own. The only possible safety seemed to lie in following his every step, dogging him like his shadow. Thus being on hand, he might turn aside as they arose a hundred indiscreet revelations, any one of which would betray him.

But the more he thought of the dangers in which he was involved, the more he felt, in a despairing way, that nothing

would be of any avail to avert them. Yes, Gardilanne would certainly find him out; and then, when the day of reckoning came, and Gardilanne demanded to see his collection, could he possibly avoid yielding him up, by way of reparation, some of its choicest treasures?

CHAPTER VIII.



HIS single night of excruciating worry aged Dalègre more than a year of ordinary life.

He had tasted in his time the complacent joy of the collector, and he now began to experience something of the bitter offsets of that solitary kind of pleasure. Next morning, having first composed his countenance as well as he could, he knocked at his guest's door, with a secret dread in his heart lest Gardilanne had already sallied forth. But no; there he was, substantial to the sight and touch; that danger was escaped. He asked himself whether, during the long watches of that tragic night, no evil suspicions had insinuatingly penetrated the blue room, and sown the seeds of calamity. He could hardly believe that it was not so.

"Come in! come in!" Gardilanne responded heartily to his knock. He was

in his dressing-gown, sitting by the open window, to take in the bracing air and study the old houses of the town.

"What! Up already?" Dalègre exclaimed, with a mock cheerfulness.

"Yes, and do you know I actually seem to *smell* faïence here."

The tone made Dalègre turn pale. He had an impulse to throw himself at the master's feet, confess his fault and humbly sue for pardon. But luckily he overcame the impulse, for it turned out that the dread Gardilanne, his ogre, was capable, like other people, of a mild pleasantry: his "*I smell faïence*" was a mere harmless expression of his good-humor.

"I have been looking at the old quarter, at those time-stained hotels and gabled houses," said Gardilanne, continuing. "I envy that Lame Devil, of the story, who could take off all the roofs, if he choose, to see what was going on within. Do you realize what pictures, tapestries, antique furniture, and awfully good faïence there must be, stowed away inside those houses? The people there have no idea what their value is, and what a treat it would be to

me, for instance, if I could only get hold of them."

"Don't cherish too many illusions on that score: the Parisian bric-a-brac dealers have scoured the town and not left a thing behind them."

"Bah! bah! the *chineurs*" — literally china-men, professed bric-a-brac hunters — "and I admit they are crafty enough—work only for gain, but take one like myself, whose motive is the pure instinct of the collector, and Providence always rewards such a man for not prostituting his talent to ignoble uses. Show me where the very king of all the chineurs has made his rounds, and right there *I* will guarantee to find you not only a fair specimen or two, but some undeniable masterpiece."

Dalègre shook his head in a skeptical way.

"Ah, happy, careless being that you are!" broke forth the other. "You have never bothered your head about bric-a-brac. Do you know what it is to have that kind of a fixed idea? Do you sleep and dream faience? Do you wake with your whole brain turned to faience?"

When you close your eyes for a moment, does there come dancing before them a visionary faïence more charming than any that ever was or ever can be actually created? Have you ever talked your acquaintance and innocent strangers to death with interminable stories about faïence?"

While Gardilanne warmed up to his subject, Dalègre took a more tranquil mien. Some of his friend's words suggested to him a means of proving an *alibi*, as it were.

"I believe I am called, here in town, the Pottery-sharp or Pottery-crank, or something of that kind," said he. "Pretty good joke on me, since it is working for you that gets me that particular reputation. They've seen me round so much in your interest, that they half think I'm gathering a collection on my own account."

Gardilanne shrugged his shoulders with contempt for the provincials, of whom it was easy for him to believe any story whatever that might be told him.

"I've overhauled and cross-questioned our city folk and peasants so much, that they imagine the things I buy for you are

for myself. Some of them fancy I've got my house full of pottery, of priceless value, ha! ha!"

"Poor fellow! I'm truly sorry for you. What thankless toils and misrepresentations I have unwittingly subjected you to!"

"Don't mention it! it has been only a pleasure to me.—But, now, as I say, I have explored town, suburbs and country, and there is really not a thing left."

"You are quite sure of it?"

"There is nothing, I tell you, nothing, nothing, nothing."

"It is lamentable," commented Gardilanne, in an indifferent tone. "So I need not expect to find even the smallest specimen?"

"I don't go quite so far as that; you may get a few common scraps. I'll take you out to some of the villages, if you like, and we'll see."

Privately, he meant to keep this promise by taking Gardilanne only to such places as he himself had sucked dry; he counted on disappointment to throw him out of all conceit with the neighborhood and lead to his speedy departure.

"What are the market-days at Nevers?"
Gardilanne suddenly asked.

"Wednesdays and Saturdays."

"Good! I've got a plan.—As a sportsman, no doubt you've taken larks with a mirror?"

"Yes, I have occasionally," admitted Dalègre.

"Good! well, I'm going to take pottery with a mirror."

"With a mirror? pottery with a mirror?"

"Why! it's like this: I shall get some plates and dishes of old Nevers and lay them on a table, in the thick of the market. Then I shall have a public crier, with a drum, and every quarter of an hour the crier will beat his drum and shout to the peasants that if they will bring in, on the next market-day, any crockery they may have of the same sort as shown, they will be paid a very profitable price for it."

"O! no!" gasped Dalègre, in affright.

"You do not appear to approve of my plan."

"It's only a joke, isn't it?"

"No, I was never more serious in my life."

"My dear Gardilanne, abandon this project, I beseech you."

"Why?"

"You will ruin my reputation in Nevers forever."

"What an idea! how could I?"

"No, listen! You don't understand the great difference there is between the freedom of action you enjoy in Paris, and the slavery of the provinces to public opinion. If a guest staying with me should perpetrate such an eccentricity as you propose, the penalty would fall not upon him but me. I should have the town about my ears. You would go away and never think of it again, but all our local wits and practical jokers would never let *me* hear the end of it. I should have to stand the brunt of, at a low computation, ten thousand sarcastic references to it.—Promise me, for old friendship's sake, to give up the idea!"

"Since you look at it thus, I will give it up. It was really only a whim, any way. Now let us go and look at the Museum."

"We shall have to wait; it is but nine o'clock, and the Museum does not open till twelve."

"You mean to say that a resident of your standing cannot get the keys and go and see it at any time he likes?"

"You may think it strange, but that is exactly the case. And, what is more, it is not open daily. I don't think it at all likely we can get in before next Thursday."

"Tut! tut! I cannot wait such a length of time. I must be off within three days."

"O, really!" cried Dalègre. He quite forgot to discipline his voice, and the joyful tone of this "O, really!" was a very imprudent indication of his state of mind.

Collectors are keen observers. The satisfied note in Dalègre's incautious exclamation jarred upon Gardianne and awoke in him a new interpretation of certain things. It led to his scrutinizing the countenance of Dalègre much more searchingly than before, and there he saw the painful spectacle of drawn, pinched-up features, an anxious, uncertain mouth,

and wandering, furtive eyes that could not look you squarely in the face. The whole personality evinced that embarrassment, weakness of moral fibre, and doubt of itself, which are so often the manifestation of a bad conscience.

There was a touch of the diamond-drill in the eyes of Gardilanne, a quality derived no doubt from their constant searching after hidden values.

"Hum! *hum!*" he reflected. "Well, but it's no new case after all; only the old story over again."

He knew, of old, that the race of collectors were given to beguiling and over-reaching one another, and recalled how, more than once, in the ingenuous beginning of his career, he had been started upon false scents by perfidious rivals, who, far from wishing him to find the favorable hunting-ground, would direct him as far from it as possible. That could not happen to him now, heaven be praised! he knew them too well. Had he taken a wife, he would not have trusted his pottery secrets even to her. He filed away Dalègre's "*O, really!*" in his inner con-

sciousness, for reference, as carefully as an expert would preserve a precious grain of arsenic found in a corpse that had come to its death under suspicious circumstances. Dalègre (this first examination having been so swift, and mute) was given no reason to think that the unlucky expression he had let fall had been caught on the instant as in a test-glass and was to be subjected thereafter to all conceivable kinds of analysis.

From this moment the Parisian began to play a part, designed to draw out the real character and intentions of his host.

"Certainly," he remarked, with an innocent air—"certainly I shall not delay at Nevers, if there is nothing here to reward the search."

"I had really hoped to have you with me a long time, but, in spite of that, strict candor compels me to tell you that you must banish from mind any expectations of faience. Do not insist upon it; drop it from mind, and stay with us, all the same; you know how welcome you are. If you don't like it here in the town, we'll just run out and try a country-place

of mine a few miles from here. The healthful air will be just the thing for you. You have been too much cooped up in an office all your days, and it will probably be precisely the thing you need."

"I find my health unusually good, here in Nevers," Gardilanne protested, in a nervous dread lest he might find himself suddenly carried off to the country and buried alive there, as it were, so that no explorations at all would be open to him.

It was decided, therefore, that they should stay in town.

Now commenced between the two collectors a mute, unrelenting mental contest, in which every cozening device was employed on either side to win the victory.

Gardilanne's one great preoccupation was how to escape his host, who attached himself to him with such a pertinacity that they were like but a single body, with two rebellious souls. A couple of convicts, dragging the same chain and meditating two wholly different methods of escape, would not have been more incompatible than they. And all the time they kept fawning upon each other and com-

plimenting each other. Every morning Dalègre must cordially shake his guest's hand, whereas he had passed half the night in prowling the corridors, for fear he should give him the slip under cover of darkness.

The house Gardilanne had thought so hospitable, on his arrival, now seemed to him nothing less than a prison. He had no liberty and no control over his own actions; if he stood up, Dalègre stood up also, and if he sat down Dalègre sat down, beside him once more. It was as if he had had two shadows, instead of one. If he looked at himself in a mirror, he was pretty sure to see the reflection of Gardilanne over his shoulder. No secret-service police could have kept a stricter *surveillance* over him than he was now subjected to. In coming to Nevers, he was treated like a convict who had broken his ban.

In his rôle of jailer who would not lose his prisoner from sight, Dalègre himself brought the hot water, in the morning, for Gardilanne's shaving. He could not trust Marguerite too far, and he replaced

her in many other small menial services, as well. Forgetting the fact that he had told Gardilanne it was his habit to go to bed early, he would now sit very late, night after night, at Gardilanne's bedside, and indulge in such endless talk, that the latter often had the impulse to cry to him:

“O, do go away, will you? and let me alone.”

Both alike suffered from this state of things; both loathed the masks they were obliged to wear, as well upon their feelings as their faces. Dalègre's affectation of cordiality was a constant torment to him, and he wore his own hypocritical pretence of hospitality like a veritable hair-shirt.

An incident convinced Gardilanne that his haunting suspicions were well founded.

At breakfast he had asked for mustard, and the old domestic hastened to the kitchen and brought him back some, in a charming Nevers mustard-pot with painted designs. At sight of it, Gardilanne gave a little involuntary cry of admiration. Dalègre, on the contrary, cried out in angry protest, and Marguerite in dismay, at the thought of her stupid maladdress.

Then all three actors in the little scene remained for an instant overwhelmed and stricken dumb. Gardilanne was the first to recover his self-possession. Stretching out his hand to take the piece, he remarked, admiringly,

“A mustard-pot of uncommon elegance, that.”

“O, no great affair,” rejoined Dalègre, nonchalantly but stretching out his own hand at the same time, to protect it.

“Charming! exquisite! and without the slightest flaw!”

“Yes, I believe it *is* rather good,” Dalègre now conceded.

“But you said there was nothing of this kind to be had here?”

“A mere windfall, a chance, such as might not happen again in a hundred years.”

“If *I* could only manage to leave Nevers with a single piece like this, I should consider my journey exceedingly well repaid.”

He held the mustard-pot caressingly and turned and turned it again. He extended it toward the light, to get the reflection

on its glaze ; he admired it with loud ejaculations and again with impressive silences ; he half-closed his eyes, he reopened them, and then he clacked his tongue in the roof of his mouth, as if he were tasting some rare wine.

During these manœuvres, at least, Dalègre had the courage to look his rival in the face. He stared hard at every one of his gestures and every gradation of them, with a fear that the other was going to put the mustard-pot in his pocket, and sequestrate it from his eyes forever.

"It's an object for which I have a great attachment," said he. "It came down to me from my grandfather."

"Did it, indeed?" rejoined Gardianne coldly, putting it back on the table again.

"What do you mean," Dalègre fiercely exclaimed to his servant, "by taking a frail, delicate thing like that for common use? Take it back to the kitchen as quick as you can, imbecile! and wash it up and put it back in the cabinet in my study, out of harm's way. If anything happens to that mustard-pot, you'll get your walking-papers; do you understand?"

" You're almost too hard on that poor old Marguerite,—or, rather, you would be if she could hear you," said Gardilanne.

He found himself astonished that a question of a paltry mustard-pot could throw his host into such a towering rage, the more so as the latter was naturally of so amiable a disposition.

Dalègre returned again to the exceptional attachment he had for a piece of bric-a-brac so long in his family. Gardilanne, familiar, as he thought himself, with similar conduct among peasants of a mercenary turn, when they wanted to bargain a thing up to the highest selling-price, skeptically summed up with the reflection:

" He flew into that passion expressly for my benefit, so as not to feel obliged to give me the mustard-pot."

Gardilanne braced himself against these adverse currents of fortune, and put the mustard-pot too away in the mental cabinet which he devoted to holding his entire collection of suspicions, much as a prosecuting officer would put under lock and key some telling piece of tangible evidence he had found for the conviction.

The mustard-pot had entered Gardilanne's eyes and imagination, if not his actual possession. It had become his in a measure, for he had possessed it with that ardent glance of the collector's eye which is keener, more all-embracing than the lynx's. And why should it not be keener than the lynx's? Is not that just the difference between men and animals? there are degrees of intelligent capacity to which, naturally, animals can never be expected to attain.

The sole object of art that had rewarded Gardilanne's hungry glance since he had set foot in the house probably took on an extra allurement and radiance from its isolated position. It grew in interest till it became for him an inexpressible wonder and rarity, a model of classic design, lost in this cold provincial interior, which seemed to the Parisian visitor, at best, a dozen times too big for its master, for his own apartment at home was so littered up with everything artistic that you could never find a chair to sit down upon.

In Dalègre's house were fauteuils done in Utrecht velvet, and pastel portraits of

ancestors, and good old mahogany Empire furniture, but none of these objects aroused a trace of interest in Gardilanne. Nor did the fine large court-yard, nor the stables, nor the aviary, nor the garden adjoining the court-yard. On the contrary, the pleasant rural quiet that reigned in them all smote as a deadly boredom upon a man who was accustomed to rise with the lark and go rushing about, through the jostling crowds of Paris, on his great bric-a-brac hunts.

The ungrateful fellow got no enjoyment whatever from the fragrance of the garden, that greeted him when he threw his window wide open in the morning, none from the sight of its luxuriant greenery, none from the rustic clucking of the hens fattening on the grain old Marguerite flung out them with liberal hand. He had eggs for his breakfast that were laid but five minutes before, and pats of delicious butter on leaves still wet with the dew, and he had fresh vegetables scarce equalled anywhere else in the world. But luxuries that would have made any other Parisian's mouth fairly water were quite

lost upon him. He was atrophied to all human tastes except those connected with his ruling passion.

It so happened, that one morning, during breakfast time, Dalègre was called away to his study by some momentary demand upon him.

"Excuse me?" said he. "I'll be back in five minutes."

When he was gone, Marguerite kept eyeing the guest, as he sat at table, with an almost commiserating look. In general he was profoundly lost in thought, but now and then he would mechanically rouse himself to dip a bit of bread in his boiled egg.

"Monsieur has not a very robust appetite," she finally ventured, forgetting her master's injunction to silence.

"No, my poor Marguerite, no," he returned, sighing.

"You're not like my master: his jaws never fail to work famously at meal-time."

Gardilanne merely touched his forehead with a forefinger, to show that the seat of his trouble was there.

"I trust you get your sleep of nights at any rate?" she went on.

"No, I can't say I even get my sleep. I rise from my slumbers but very little refreshed."

"Perhaps your bed is not made as you like it? If there's anything of that kind the matter, Monsieur must not hesitate to tell me."

A sudden illumination flashed through the mind of Gardilanne.

"You are not deaf, then, it seems?" he said.

A piercing scream from Marguerite followed this observation, and she clapped her hands in a desperate way over her ears.

"Yes! yes! I am! I am!! I am deaf! I am *deaf!*" she cried at the top of her voice, while her countenance was contorted with workings of terror.

And then, hastening still closer to Gardilanne, she howled at him with all the strength of her lungs,

"I am deaf! I am *deaf!*"

Gardilanne dropped his napkin, picked it up again, and began to study the old woman with a calmer scrutiny. She now stood as if rooted to the floor, her hands still pressed closely against her ears.

"Decidedly," thought he, "there's some very queer business going on in this house."

Dalègre reappeared, and Marguerite profited by his entrance to seek refuge in flight.

Taking care not to betray by any sign the discovery he had fallen upon, and even schooling his voice down to its gentlest, most natural tones, Gardilanne now remarked :

"My dear friend, time passes pleasantly under your hospitable roof, nevertheless I ought to tell you that I must not lose from sight the mission for which I came. I hate to insist upon it, but I really must take up my explorations anew."

"Very well, then," assented his host, "to-morrow we'll take a turn in the town."

CHAPTER IX.



NE whole day was consumed in the second-hand shops, but these offered nothing beyond a few sticks of squalid furniture, some door fan-lights, painted by common glass decorators, and other articles of no greater attractiveness.

Dalègre took care, as he had planned, to conduct his friend only to places he himself had previously stripped, in order to bluff his feverish curiosity and desire to buy. He made him squander three more days uselessly in the suburbs and more remote environs, and did not let him see a thing but some common table-ware of the people, which might be worth, at a fair valuation, four sous the plate. The Parisian now despaired and cursed the ill-advised journey that had brought him hither.

But a new circumstance redoubled his

suspicions. Having occasion to write a letter, he was conducted to the study. Dalègre supposed that he had disengaged this room of every tell-tale article, but unluckily he had left one piece behind, a small faïence writing-desk, which stood upon his table. Gardilanne, catching sight of this, greeted it again with his quick cry of appreciation.

Dalègre managed to keep the upper part of his person impassive, but his strong agitation was shown by the way his foot rapidly tapped the floor, and a whole drama of desperate contortions was played by the muscles in his shoes. Guilty and anxious to know his fate, he looked now at his judge and now at the indisputable piece of evidence thus suddenly sprung upon him.

This writing-desk was just the prettiest thing that ever was seen. It had a soft, milky-white glaze, almost as fine as that of Sèvres *pâte tendre*. Over the smooth, warm white of its ground spread a capricious pattern, with interlaced puppet-figures, of the school of Callot, gallant dwarfs sighing at the feet of fair ladies,

whose slim, graceful shapes called to mind the most admired types of the Renaissance.

The entire surface was covered with a playful arabesque, in green and yellow, about rich heraldic escutcheons, and the decoration embellished the interior as well as the exterior, not omitting even the bottom nor any part of the sides.

"It is nothing less than royal," declared Gardilanne, with conviction. He was capable, had it been possible, of reducing himself to the capacity of such a writing-desk, and getting into it to pass the rest of his days, in order to thoroughly enjoy it.

"This also comes down to me——" began Dalègre, pale with agitation.

"From your grandmother, no doubt?" cut in Gardilanne dryly.

An icy coolness succeeded to this preliminary engagement between the two men; they lay up on their arms as it were awhile and then Gardilanne again first broke the silence.

"How does it happen that such a writing-desk is found at Nevers?" he asked. It is not of your make, but one of the finest of specimens of the old Moustiers ware."

"The Nevers potters have always liked to keep before their eyes some specimens of the product of the rival manufactories. I've even found soup-tureens of Neder-viller here."

"Indeed? and where are they?"

Dalègre had spoken much too hastily.

"I—I—have given them away," he responded in strong embarrassment.

"To whom?" demanded Gardilanne sternly. His imperious tone showed that he considered it was something like a direct offence to himself, to give away things to anybody but him, the master and collector *par excellence*. "Have you some connoisseurs at Nevers, then, after all?"

Dalègre, overwhelmed under the growing difficulties of his situation, found himself well-nigh at the end of his resources.

"It's a surprise to me," continued Gardilanne, refraining from any violence of expression, "to find you so well posted. You talk of faïence like an expert. I did not know I should one day have such an accomplished disciple. It is a high honor of which I am but too proud."

Dalègre could only stammer and half

choke, yet he continued to insist upon his ignorance.

"No, it won't do; it won't do," persisted Gardilanne. "You are as well posted as I am. A man who knows a thing like this has nothing more to learn of anybody.—Now let us be frank with each other. The writing-desk is perfectly adorable, I admit it without any qualifications. Will you let me have it for five hundred francs? You would be doing me a great favor, besides, and I should thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"It is a family heirloom and—and it would be too painful for me to part with it."

"Very well! then let us say no more about it."

"I would—er willingly give it to you, without money and without price, only that it recalls to me so nearly my lamented grandmother."

"That's enough; say no more, I beseech!" responded Gardilanne, his voice apparently touched with emotion.

"Five hundred francs is a big price, it is true," persisted Dalègre, "but you un-

derstand that money cannot be a temptation in such a case. I sincerely wish I could offer it to you freely, as I say."

"I appreciate the delicacy of your motives," rejoined Gardilanne, outwardly cool, though harassed with keen vexation.

"It's different here in the provinces from what it is with you," said Dalègre, heaving a sigh, which he endeavored to render pathetic. "We quiet rustic folk live only in the memory of our family traditions."

This talk between them was, as it were, the moist breath upon the once bright steel of their friendship: it was the beginning of corrosion; the destroying rust would soon complete its work.

Though silent and kept well in subjection, a baneful jealousy brooded between them; it was evident that friendship and the bric-a-brac passion could never dwell together in the same breast.

Nevertheless, Dalègre in his quality of host made some attempt to have his visitor forget the unpleasantness, and by way of peace-offering gave him at breakfast a certain Burgundy that had been twenty

years in the bottle. It proved to be wholly wasted on an unappreciative palate; your true collector has little sense of the epicurean joys of the table. Gardilanne scorned the Burgundy, yet he would willingly have fasted an entire week if by so doing he might have had the Moustiers-ware writing-desk for his recompense.

"I am off to-morrow," he at length announced.

"So soon? Must you go?"

"Yes," bitterly. "What have I to do now in this part of the country?"

The meal was dispatched under the influence of this bitterness. Dalègre felt a certain remorse for his conduct, but not enough to induce him to part with the coveted writing-desk. When they had finished their coffee, Gardilanne expressed a desire for another tour in the town. He requested Dalègre not to accompany him, but Dalègre was not the man to yield to such a request: he had covenanted with himself not to quit Gardilanne any more than his shadow, and he meant to stick to his covenant. His guest was openly displeased at this pertinacity, but that

made no difference, he kept it up just the same.

As a rule, the two used to sally forth arm in arm, but this day Gardilanne, intending to recover his liberty, rushed quickly on in advance, and at once put a distance of several paces between him and his friend. And this was only a beginning, for his long sinewy legs presently began to tear through the town, at a headlong pace, extremely fatiguing to the Nivernais, who was of quite the opposite build—of plethoric habit, and much more amply developed in the stomach than in the limbs.

Gardilanne took the steeper streets at full tilt like a soldier charging a battery and the downhill ones like an unruly horse, running away. Across the wide squares, blazing in hot sunshine, he rushed, without turning a hair, while Dalègre puffed on behind him, bathed in perspiration. Gardilanne, even in his wild course, was able to scrutinize keenly the shops and domestic interiors, and he sniffed the air of every ancient building they passed with a certain characteristic movement of the

nostrils that made his pursuer tremble with apprehension.

In this manner, they finally reached the quays, near the long bridge across the Nievre. There is the headquarters of the potters who make common stone-ware and paint upon it designs showing the river, the boatmen, and the glowing sun, so dear to the hearts of the vine-growers. The river bank is inhabited by a humble class, consisting chiefly of day-laborers and watermen.

Gardilanne here relaxed his pace, and began to dart a keen glance into each open door and window. On the walls was coarse pottery, there were plates with large crowing cocks, barber's basins, with rollicking mottoes, and saints'-name salad-bowls, in which the river-men's ancestors were depicted under the holy guise of the saints whose names they bore.

Gardilanne wanted none of this, yet the view of each successive piece made his heart beat with a more active thump.

" You see," said Dalègre, at his elbow, " nothing but the commonest of trash, as I told you."

The other continued his rounds and vouchsafed no reply.

At the end of the quays was a long shed, holding a mass of material chiefly from demolished buildings. There were old doors and windows, dilapidated furniture, heaps of rags and rubbish for the paper-maker, while at the entrance was a lot of old odd volumes, such as you see at the doors of second-hand shops generally.

In the depths of the shed loomed up a large, peasant-sort of wardrobe. It was so tall that it almost reached the rough beams of the ceiling, and through one of its open doors was visible a miscellaneous assortment of odds and ends.

Gardilanne stopped a moment, as if to take breath, and peered into the place with half-shut eyes.

"That looks like a famous clothes-press you've got there," said he to the proprietor, who was bent over a work-bench, planing a board.

Dalègre, coming up, stared in surprise first at the article in question, and then at his friend.

"Too high, unluckily," Gardilanne con-

tinued. "If it were not for that, I might take it away to Paris with me."

"Monsieur comes from Paris, then?" said the junk-man politely.

"Will you just permit me to measure the height of it? If I *could* get it into my apartment, and you were disposed to be reasonable, we might strike up a bargain.—How much for the wardrobe?"

"A fine piece of furniture that; it's worth fifty francs, if it's worth a sou."

"O, come! fifty francs? What do you take me for?"

"Remark that it's all of natural oak, and the metal-work is of a sort you don't find nowadays."

"I'll take it at forty francs."

"Are you cracked?" Dalègre here put in. "I'll agree to furnish you all you like of them, at half the money."

"Oh! the Parisians are well posted," cried the junk-man, "they understand a thing or two; they are sharp, they are. They expect to buy a wardrobe of you for fifty francs that's worth a cool three hundred. I just want you to look at that base-moulding, Sir. Is there a single

joiner capable of working wood like that in these times?"

Thus arguing, the proprietor stopped planing his board for the moment, and brought two chairs and offered them to the visitors, with the skeptical Burgundian remark,

"We're not in church here: there's no extra charge for sitting down."

"Don't put yourself out: I see perfectly well from where I am," said Gardilanne. "I will give you forty francs and not a cent more."

"It cost *me* forty-one, without the transportation. I should lose money. Every man must live, you know."

"It would be dear at twenty-five," interposed Dalègre anew.

"Ah, how can you say such things?" appealed the merchant, indignant that a fellow-townsman should spoil his trade.

"Forty francs and the carriage would make sixty francs. Too much!" And Gardilanne started out of the shop.

"Stay! let us split the difference: you surely won't mind giving me forty-five francs."

"I'll think of it," said Gardilanne.

"Seriously, you're not going to load yourself up with that hideous wardrobe, are you?" Dalègre asked when they were moving on again.

"I need one, and this looks as if it might be useful to me."

"If you will stay in Nevers a couple of days longer, I'll guarantee to find you plenty of better and cheaper ones."

Discussing pros and cons, they came again to Dalègre's door. Dalègre supposed they were both to enter it, when Gardilanne, without a word of warning, suddenly took to his heels, left him in the lurch, and called back over his shoulder.

"I'm going to see about that clothespress again."

No doubt he anticipated pursuit, even a desperate chase, for he clapped his hat hard down upon his head, and fairly doubled his long legs up to his chin in the formidable speed of his flight.

"Heigh! hold on! Gardilanne, wait for me I say!" shouted Dalègre, stricken with stupefaction somewhat like that of a policeman who sees a malefactor confided to his

keeping all at once bolt out of the window of a moving train.

Gardilanne made him no response. The dust he raised shrouded his flying form, which presently diminished to a black point and then disappeared entirely from view.

Dalègre watched him out of sight. Then shrugging his shoulders with an involuntary air of relief, he said:

“As he hasn’t picked up a thing in Nevers, his mania has half turned his head, and I suppose he’s going to try to gratify it on that rusty old wardrobe for lack of better.”

CHAPTER X.

OULD you have seen Gardilanne tearing through Nevers on the wild jump, like a runaway horse, you would have been really frightened. Such egregious haste, such a self-absorption were rare indeed to the eyes of the staid provincials. His coat-tails fluttered in the wind, his long thin legs spaced off the ground like mammoth dividers, and his gray locks streamed back from beneath his flapping hat-brim, behind his ears. It was in no way in keeping with the Chief of Division's usual proper and conventional behavior, but just now he had dismissed all care for appearances.

In ten minutes he was back again at the junk-shop, on the quays.

"As I leave for home to-night," said he, "I want to settle this matter of the

wardrobe. First, let me have a look at the inside of it."

"Certainly; why not? You'll find it as stout and solid, both inside and out, as a prison door."

"All right! throw out this old truck. What's all this stuff, any way?"

The bottom of the wardrobe was full of scraps of old iron and old kitchen utensils, while the upper shelves seemed to contain nothing of any greater value.

In a corner of the topmost shelf, however, there was a glint of light on a half-disclosed piece of faience, of a peculiar configuration, no doubt, however, some sorry worthless object, like all the rest. But the dealer, while cleaning out the press, casually remarked:

"By the way, is Monsieur a musician?"

"Why? what if I were?"

"There's a contrapshun gimerack here, that some fool or other has made—a crockery violin."

Gardilanne's heart smote his ribs as if it would break through, but his countenance remained impassive; he did not

betray his great emotion by so much as the tremor of an eyelid.

"A toy for children, I suppose," he commented carelessly.

"Not at all; I don't let any of the young ones round here get their paws on it, I can tell you: they'd break it in no time. No, it's a regular fiddle.—Worth something like six francs."

So speaking, he reached the violin down from the shelf, and handed it to Gardilanne. The latter felt the penetrating thrill of its precious contact, but dared not, as yet, look fairly at it. He felt a convulsive disturbance even in his eyes, and turned his head away to escape detection. He found strength to master himself, muttered a disdainful "Pooh!" and took to opening and shutting the doors of the wardrobe, affecting to assure himself of their proper working.

But this was a too sudden and violent access of emotion. It resulted in a sort of dizziness in his head,—to such an extent that he found it most prudent to sit down and rest himself a bit.

Six francs for the matchless violin,

which was worth six thousand at least? These are the shocks that shorten collectors' lives: their spinal marrow and its brain connections are not made capable of enduring long the prodigious strains they are subjected to.

"See here, I tell you what I'll do," said Gardilanne, "I'll take your wardrobe, at forty francs, but you must throw in that gimerack fiddle. It is of no consequence, of course, but I have a notion I'd like to make a present of it to a little nephew of mine."

"Take it! done!" assented the trader, in bluff fashion. "But just bear in mind that you've got an uncommon good piece of furniture there. It's just massacred at that price."

Tremulous, shaken like a leaf with his feverish exaltation, Gardilanne counted down the money, took the violin under his arm, and started away.

"Let me wrap it up for you. I'll put a piece of paper round it," said the junkman.

"Never mind! don't bother," he returned, in mortal dread lest the huckster

should still change his mind and never let him have it again should it be once more got back into his possession. He seized a piece of paper as he went and hastily enveloped it himself.

"And where shall I send the wardrobe?" bawled the dealer after him.

"To the bottom of the river if you like," Gardilanne shouted back, and bolted with all speed from the vicinity.

On his way back to Dalègre's, he reflected as to what line of conduct he ought properly to pursue toward his host, in view of the notably altered situation. His first impulse was to quite overwhelm him with the sight of the faïence violin, thus paying off his piggishness in the matter of the mustard-pot, the writing-desk, and all the rest. But on the whole his new happiness made him feel kindly. No one could now afford better than he to put all rancor aside. Overjoyed to the last degree at his precious find, he drew near the house and confided to chance the next turn the incident might take, and the manner in which the disclosure should be made to Dalègre.

Precisely at the moment of his return, his host was seen hanging out of a window, and staring intently down the street in the direction in which he had disappeared.

"Heigh there! is there some good packer for valuables, around here, near by?" Gardilanne shouted up to him from afar.

"A pressing question truly: is he going to get that big clumsy wardrobe put up in cotton by a professional packer?" Dalègre asked himself. But the package under his guest's arm gave him a growing uneasiness.

"My dear, dear Dalègre, let me embrace you, with joy," cried Gardilanne, in a moved voice, and he proceeded to throw himself upon Dalègre's neck.

"But--er--why? what is it all about?"

Gardilanne began to throw off the wrappings from his treasure, with fevered hands that impeded each other, in their haste.

"I have found the famous violin," he cried.

"What violin?"

"Here, look at it! and you'll see. The faïence violin!"

Then indeed the marvellous instrument

appeared in all its unrivalled splendor. Its graceful curves, its fugitive lines of beauty were such as might drive a Stradivarius wild. Its glaze was of an incomparable limpidity, and the blue in its design recalled the deep blue of the skies of Spain. The potter's art had never made a greater triumph. Over the whole surface, not a flaw, not a crackle in the glaze, even where the delicate curvature of the neck resolved itself into the main portion of the body.

Dalègre grew green with suppressed jealousy, and when Gardilanne turned the instrument over, and displayed its back, there came a swimming before his eyes. It seemed to the Nivernais as if he could never support the sight of that *chef-d'œuvre* of design. In the clouds were angels, with 'cellos, supporting a scroll on which was the legend: *Musica et gloria in aer*; while, beneath, courtiers in the dress of Louis XIV. clustered round a fair dame at the harpsichord.

Gardilanne wished for a hundred eyes, like Argus, to properly enjoy his acquisition.

"Is it good enough to suit you? Is it a beauty, or isn't it?" he demanded of the other in rapture.

Dalègre could no longer control his emotion; a cold sweat stood upon his brow; his voice refused to issue from his parched throat. Had Gardilanne knocked him down with an actual blow of the violin, it would have been much preferable to the complete mental and moral knock-down, the paralysis of his entire being that was caused by this vaunting exhibition of it. Wholly unnerved, he dropped heavily into a chair.

"Bear in mind the reception I'll have when I return with it to Paris, the day after to-morrow," added Gardilanne, cruel in his complete preoccupation. He was going to be prouder than a victorious general coming back from his wars; he saw a civic triumph decreed him by a grateful people, who made the air ring with plaudits and scattered his pathway full of flowers.

"Where—did you—find—the violin?" gasped Dalègre when he could command his respiration.

"At that junk-shop where I bargained for the wardrobe."

"O, *no?* it isn't *possible?*" His frame quivered under the of shock a new and startling surprise.

"Didn't you see the violin there? For my part, I feared I should be made cross-eyed for life by the way I was taking it in and all the while affecting not to."

"And was it while *I* was with you?"

"To be sure it was. You haven't got a keen enough edge on your optics yet; you'll stand a few more lessons. Do you mean to say you didn't suspect anything when all the dickering was going on? The wardrobe was the bush, and I saw a rare singing bird in it, and tried to lure it out by piping pleasant tunes. You ought to have been brighter, after all the pains I took with you in Paris.—And now, where shall I find the very best packer you've got in the place?"

"To pack up the violin?"

"Yes. I must arrange to have him put it first in cotton and then protect that still further with thick layers of bran and wool. I want him immediately."

"Are you really in such a hurry?"

"Yes, I must be off to-morrow."

Dalègre was now as much grief-stricken at Gardilanne's approaching departure as he had previously been overjoyed. The way the violin had been taken from under his very nose was a blow that well-nigh broke his heart, but, when it should be removed from his sight altogether, he felt that to him the disaster would be irreparably complete.

It might have been supposed that this event would have proved the finishing-touch to the estrangement of the two collectors, but it brought about a sort of reconciliation instead.

Dalègre, who had been all gall and wormwood hitherto, became now all smiles and honeyed sweetness. He pampered his guest at table, as if he had been a millionaire uncle, and he resented in reproachful words the brevity of his stay at Nevers.

"You have not seen anything," he urged, "and you have not stopped even long enough for the benefit of a needed rest. *Why* can you not postpone your departure?"

Gardilanne did not take the bait of these belated courtesies, but would have set off that very evening if he could. He had but a single, absorbing idea in his head: it was as to where in his collection he had best put up the famous treasure to show it to the greatest advantage.

CHAPTER XI.



ARDILANNE departed. A month later, Dalègre's best friends would hardly have known him. The jolly bachelor, whose cheeks had been so plump and rosy, had become wan and wasted, a picture of jaundiced despair. Envy and jealousy undermined his robust health; his appetite abandoned him, and his pillow at night was visited by a congeries of evil nightmares, which danced wildly over him and continually taunted him about the faïence violin, that was not his.

These nightmares were all the more harrowing, because they invariably commenced with sweet illusions. He closed his eyes and heard celestial music, choirs of angels, singing ravishing songs accompanied, on the faïence violin, by Saint Cecilia in person, who drew from it harmonies clearer than tones of crystal.

With a full and grateful heart, he would float on the tide of heavenly music, till presto! the blue sky of heaven changed to sulphurous blue flames with pestilential odors, a horrid goblin vaulted astride of his breast, and, seizing the self-same violin, rasped excruciating discords upon it that tormented every spiritual sense as much as the monster's insupportable weight tormented his helpless body.

He would awake, almost gone daft, and, to prevent a recurrence of the diabolical experience, would rise, open his window, and sit a very long time beside it, waiting till, as he hoped, the nightmares had flown.

With daylight they disappeared, but only to give place to his actual realization of the loss of the faïence violin, which was just as bad or possibly worse.

"How perfectly it would have fitted in yonder spot!" he would sigh, fixing his eyes on a certain part of his high, panelled wainscot.

Well he knew, or fancied he knew, that if he could have had that one fascinating article for his own, his reputation would

have been made, he would have been as one consecrated and apart from other men forever.

One day, while sorting over a heap of dishes, he came upon those Mondoville music-plates which had formerly given him so much pleasure. Yes, they had once been a joy to him, whereas now they almost drew tears from his eyes. One bright little ditty in particular, with its quaint measure of plain-song, recalled but too well his own careless happy character, as it had used to be:

*"Pour passer doucement ma vie
Avec mon petit revenu,
Amis, je prends une abbaye
Et je la consacre à Bacchus."*

Which may be rudely translated as follows:

*"A monastery I,
So care shall never rack us,
Propose, good friends, to buy
And worship jolly Bacchus."*

How sweet it would have been to have picked out on the faïence violin, this gay

little tune, indestructibly burned into the ware, and sheltered under the protection of the ceramic glaze.

Dalègre's even disposition, once the charm of his character, disappeared, and gave place to a chronic irritability and despondency. Proud and eager as he had once been over every new specimen in his collection, he now regarded the whole with worse than indifference. The failure to secure the masterpiece had left a yawning void on his walls, and, lacking that, all the rest seemed to him mere chaff and meaningless vanity.

His disappointment in the only pursuit that held his interest changed his manner of looking at the whole world. Some spring in Dalègre's nature seemed broken, and, just as his glance became bitter and morose, his entire constitution ran down-hill at a rapid pace.

People at Nevers grew uneasy over this dark hypochondria which had settled down upon one who had long been the life of the place. Mothers of marriageable daughters especially regretted it, since there was not one of them who would

not have liked this gay bachelor for her son-in-law.

Far indeed was Dalègre from any thoughts of marriage. He had never contemplated it more than very slightly at best, and then, when he engaged himself to pottery, she proved herself a mistress who would not share the least part of her exacting domination with any other. He had coasted, as it were, the shores of matrimony and surveyed its shoals and breakers, but then warily sheered off, unwilling even to attempt to make that port which is said to be such a complete shelter from the winds of passion. He had chosen pottery for his mistress expecting to find peace in this reputable connection; but we see how wrong he was, what great perturbation of spirit awaited him even there.

Now that we come to it, a match had once been talked of between him and a pretty cousin of his own, in the place. They were children together and had played at little husband and wife. When they grew up, these pleasant bonds had been allowed to relax, without, however, being ever definitely cast off. The pro-

posed marriage had been succeeded by an affectionate friendship, which neither of the parties to it wished to see diminish.

Dalègre had been in the habit of seeing this pretty cousin at her home. Her mother prudently refrained from any attempt to hasten his inclination, for she deemed, with good provincial common sense, that it was better for a man to have his fling before settling down to family life. When he became absorbed in collecting, these friendly visits slackened and, in time, almost ceased. Previous to the arrival of Gardilanne, he had not been to his aunt's for as much as three months. Having allowed so unpardonable an interval to elapse, he feared the just reproaches that would be made him, and ended by absenting himself altogether.

The incident of the violin and the morbid envy that was devouring him were once relieved by a lucid moment. Reason having briefly regained the upper hand, he called to mind those two kind relatives who had good ground to complain of his courtesy, and went and looked them up again. He secretly hoped

perhaps to find some alleviation of his woeful plight in that calm interior from which the turmoil of the outer world was carefully excluded.

The ladies received him as hospitably as of yore, but they professed themselves startled by the great change in his appearance and talked to him so much about it, that he realized for the first time the danger he was in. He sounded the shoal water of the lee-shore on which he was drifting, and determined at last to take some vigorous measures for his own safety.

CHAPTER XII.



ALEGRE packed his valise, two days later, and started for Paris, where his first visit was to Gardilanne. He found him between the hours of six and seven, the time when, after his frugal repast, he used to sink back in his padded arm-chair and feast his eyes in a beatific way on the objects of art so thickly distributed round him. These glances were the rare cordials, as it were, smooth and sweet or potent and strong, that he used to take for his dessert, having no need of any other.

Dalègre was aware that a glimpse of the faïence violin would be a dagger-thrust, and during the journey he had tried to prepare himself for the perhaps mortal wound. To break its force, he invested himself with a sort of moral shirt of mail—consisting in the eminent advisability of

his purpose to have one last final explanation with Gardilanne.

He came to Paris to show Gardilanne his suffering state, much as an invalid might come to exhibit to a learned physician the ravages of a grievous disease and consult him as to a remedy. He had fully determined to strip off all disguise, and declare:

“I can no longer live without the faïence violin: if I do not have it in my possession I shall die.”

Brooding, sensitive natures find in this kind of resolutions a temporary benumbing of their pains; they are forever setting up ideal structures which seem exceedingly simple in theory but are highly difficult in practice.

All along the journey upward, Dalègre had racked his brains for the best form of words in which to frame his supplication. He had varied this in a hundred ways, but the proceeding itself seemed to him the most natural thing in the world. But when he found himself in Gardilanne's presence, he had not a word to say; a paralysis crippled his speech; he seemed

to realize that the request he intended was forbidden to one like him, who had so rudely refused Gardilanne the faïence writing-desk.

"Good! you drop down just at a lucky moment," Gardilanne said to him, as he stood awkward and silent. "The violin is strung and in playing order. In three days you will be able to assist at a remarkable gathering. Our Faïence Club gives a reception, and, during the reception, an artist, from the Grand Opera, will play an air on the faïence violin."

Dalègre's head inclined upon his breast and still he dared not open his mouth.

"I shall put you up at the Faïence Club, and you will be obliged to me, I know, for it is not a place the first comer can enter. To be eligible to regular membership, one must establish that he has both a valuable collection and extensive acquirements in the special subjects to which the club devotes its attention."

Dalègre showed little corresponding enthusiasm.

"You may not be aware that pottery is the one question of the time, the absorb-

ing topic of the hour; but so it is," Gardilanne went on. "Paris lives but for faïence. Distinguished strangers are coming in from all parts of Europe, to seek admission to the club. Regularly, on the first Friday of each month, we have a dinner at which the viands are served in the most beautiful faïence in existence. In the evening, prizes are awarded for any pieces hitherto unknown. To give you an idea, last month the service consisted entirely of pieces in the shape of flowers, fruits or vegetables. The contributor was a certain doctor, on the Boulevard Beaumarchais, who has passed his life collecting that beautiful speciality. There were asparagus, peaches, pears, nuts, everything you can imagine, and I assure you the illusion was so complete, in the case of many of the fruits, that we did not know the faïence article from the real thing, till we attempted to cut them. *There's a man who is well repaid for his long years of research and labor. We voted him a medal, as you may well believe.*"

"I might do well to consult that doctor," thought Dalègre sadly. He felt that

a man with such exceptional acquirements might minister to his pernicious faïence disease more effectually than any other.

"You have a depressed air, now I look at you: anything the matter?" queried Gardilanne.

"I have not been feeling well, for some time,—not since your visit to Nevers."

The Parisian was much too obtuse to catch the allusion.

"The Club is your affair," said he; "it will put new life into you. You'll see a complete service of Rouen, in the horn-of-plenty pattern, we've lately got. We secured it, at a bargain, in consequence of a legal separation between a certain well-known collector and his wife. He had neglected her a little too much, it seems, in his zeal for faïence. The husband got it into his head that the horn had somehow brought him bad luck in his domestic affairs, so he proceeded to bundle the whole service out of his house. The Club got the benefit of it, as I say."

Dalègre thought little enough of the Rouen horn-of-plenty pattern, and indeed scarce even listened to Gardilanne—who,

on the contrary, fancying he was interesting him immensely, warmed to his subject more and more.

"If you've got a few days to spare," said he, "I want to take you to a friend's house who has the most singular faience-collection you ever dreamed of. His specialty is pottery of the Revolution of '89. He has plates commemorating the Act of Federation, pitchers devoted to the memory of the Constitutional priests, sauce-boats celebrating the virtues of Monsieur Necker, soup-tureens representing the fall of the Bastille. That fellow has simply filled his house, from top to bottom, with seditious faience which reeks with the incendiaryism and ribaldry that overthrew the nobles and clergy and brought the king to the scaffold. It is hideous; I ask myself how a man can recall in such a way that epoch of conflagration and blood. Between ourselves, he is none too favorably looked upon among us: we feel as if such a man covertly menaced by his collection the security of society and encouraged the pilage of all works of art, including our own."

"Now, the secretary of the Club is a

person of an entirely different sort, just as conservative as the other is radical. He collects nothing but the royalist device of the *fleur-de-lis*. He finds this pattern on plates, clock-dials, hand-washing fountains, and even warming-pans. There's an interesting collection and one that will make its mark. Or, if you like better, we'll go down to the Rue Vendome, to a certain actor's, who devotes himself to crowing cocks on dinner-plates. They say he has already got together about seventeen thousand. No political idea in his case; he merely enjoys the extraordinary variety of pose, plumage, and color he finds in them. These seventeen thousand crowing cocks have cost him a very pretty sum of money already."

Such gossip would once have been most agreeable to Dalègre, but that day was past; it could have no effect now upon his fixed idea. Neither the Faïence Club, nor the Rouen cornucopia design, nor the gravy-boat in memory of disinterested Monsieur Necker, nor the *fleur-de-lis* nor the crowing cocks could distract him from his brooding on the faïence violin.

Gardilanne took him to see the Crauk brothers, rich bankers who were a prey to the epidemic in its severest form. There they were shown a Henri II. ware thimble, that had cost six hundred and twenty-seven thousand francs and fifty centimes, at the sale of the late Monsieur Rattier. It was an object that put its owners' lives in daily danger from robbers or nefarious rivals, but it left Dalègre unmoved. The crystalline tones of the faïence violin breathed in his imagination and exalted him far above the plane of all such fantastic and ephemeral trifles.

"You must see the carriage, in china, that once belonged to Madame Dubarry," said Gardilanne, but once again, before this marvel the visitor was mute. He had not one word of commendation to spare for those elaborate panels, covered with scenes of old-time gallantry, which had been fabricated in the workshop of the Marquis de Custine.

He saw with equal indifference all varieties of ware from the banks of the Rhine; and yet the pink that ran through it would seem cheerful enough to restore a

contented view of life to the most misanthropic. Not all the charming color-schemes of Strasbourg and of Nederviller had the smallest effect upon a mind poisoned by eternal repining for the faïence violin.

As a special favor, Gardilanne got permission to visit a sort of menagerie of faïence, the proprietor of which had no liking for strangers. There were a court and garden crowded with life-size animals in crockery, lions, dogs, and especially dragons, with blazing eyes, which seemed to intend the instant destruction of any rash being who entered there. Dalègre, like another Orpheus in Hades, in fancy hugged to his breast the famous violin, and escaped these hideous monsters unscathed.

He was brought into relations with a man, in the neighborhood of the Luxembourg, who gathered only faïence garden-seats. Variations upon this theme were rare, for he had but thirty-seven in all. All, however, were fairly royal specimens, pieces almost fit for the gods. When you had seen them, you sighed never to sit

down again on anything less beautiful than one of those semi-tripods, due to Rouen when the art in Normandy was a splendor to the eyes of men. And yet once again and still did Dalègre prefer his cherished violin.

He assisted at controversies as between faïence and porcelain. He heard, in truth, little but disdain for the fine wares of China, Japan and Dresden; even the most exquisite *pâte tendre* of Sèvres found no grace in the eyes of the severe critics whom he chiefly heard discourse.

He did not lose sight, nevertheless, of the object of his journey: daily he assured himself that he would reveal to Gardilanne the cause of his melancholy, and daily he shrank back in dread from the ordeal. He felt more and despairingly certain that his former friend would never consent to relinquish to him the object which was the envy of all Paris. Not a collector was there who ever set eyes upon Gardilanne without asking immediately after the condition of the famous violin.

So at last Dalègre left Paris without having lisped a syllable of the secret that

was conducting him to the tomb. This, however, was due in part to a different idea he had hit upon: he decided that it would be best, after all, to acquaint Gardilanne with it by letter. He meant to throw such a sincerity into the missive that nothing but a heart of adamant could resist his appeal.

He did write—and his letter was read by Gardilanne, in full session of the Faïence Club. It was too triumphant a testimony to the merit of his violin to be kept undivulged. It was heart-breaking. The writer depicted in moving words the thrill he had experienced at the moment he first set eyes upon the violin, the inexpressible longing that was consuming him for its possession, and the poignant suffering, for lack of it, which was robbing him of appetite, sleep, peace of mind, and even desire of life.

The Club had a certain sympathy for Dalègre. Each of its members, in his time, had gone through some variation of the same symptoms, and fellow-sufferers often take no small interest in one another. But in the main they looked at him only

through Gardilanne's flattered eyes and as at a most beautiful case in moral pathology. If they had published any bulletin, Dalègre would have found himself reported in it at very elaborate length.

The fame of Gardilanne's faïence violin was enhanced by this letter, much like that of some wilful beauty for whom despairing suitors have blown their heads off.

"What reply are you going to make that benighted rustic?" scornfully demanded some of those who had taken a dislike to Dalègre for his notable apathy towards various of their Parisian wonders.

Gardilanne merely shrugged his shoulders, with an air as if he were quite of their own way of thinking about his late visitor.

Nevertheless he was better-natured than he seemed. He retained a vivid recollection of his visit to Nevers, and could not forget that it was through Dalègre's hospitality he had ferreted out the faïence violin. Upon reflection, he made answer to Dalègre's letter with a promise to leave him the instrument after his death. He was reminded by the letter, he said,

that it was high time he drew his will, and Dalègre would certainly find himself legatee of the faïence violin, should he survive the testator.

What ecstasy for the Nivernais man! It was so long since his heart had been warmed by the least ray of hope that he gave his joy the fullest course. He saw himself already in possession of the violin. He could not keep the good news to himself but announced it to everybody. He ran, the first thing, to his cousin's, and astonished the household by this sudden recovery of his good spirits, which, for more than a year, had been stifled in thick fogs of melancholy.

He was once more the gay, lively, entertaining Dalègre of other times, with an added touch to his pleasure in the gratification shown by his fellow-townsmen at his recovery. Such a happy serenity of temper is a quality universally appreciated. He bubbled over with talk, anecdotes, and laughter; and every laugh of his was as a healing application to his poor, tried brain so long bereft of warrant for any agreeable sensations. He was be-

coming old before his time, and this beneficent reaction gave him back the freshness of a second youth.

He had neglected his pleasant garden, and it would have lapsed into a jungle, but for old Marguerite, who took care to trim the rank vegetation occasionally. When he strolled out into it now, the color and fragrance of the roses were a revelation to him, while the breeze, coming up from the river, fanned his brow refreshingly. The flowers, the trees, the sound of running water, threw him into a pleasant dreaminess. If the hunting-season had been on, he would have scoured the woods again, or if there had been balls and parties, he would have shown anew what an indefatigable dancer he could be.

He noticed by chance the clothing he wore, and was disgusted to notice what a deplorable state it was in. He had scarce made a change in it in time immemorial. He proceeded to take out of his wardrobe a fashionable coat, trousers of a delicate spring-like tint, and his most elegant waistcoat, and, putting them on, completed the effect by fixing a rose in his

buttonhole. In this guise, completely revolutionized in appearance, and made new by Gardilanne's promise, he started on a promenade through the town of Nevers.

"The violin is going to be mine, mine!" he cried to Marguerite, as he left the house.

The faithful old servant was happy in his transformation, for the poor soul had endured no end of trials from his crabbed temper, ever since this fatal madness for collecting began.

CHAPTER XIII.

ATURALLY, such ill-founded exhilaration could not last. In a week Dalègre's intoxication was over, and then what remained for him to do? Nothing but to think of Gardilanne's will, and this of course simply implied thinking of Gardilanne's death.

But Gardilanne was of a tough, dry, wiry make, and his passion stimulated the very best sort of hygiene, that is to say, unlimited exercise. He was not the kind of a collector to grow fat and unwieldy in his arm-chair, nor to let his active limbs lose their vigor in any Oriental sort of lassitude. What limit could be fixed to the probable age of such a man, in the prime of life, and doubly guaranteed, furthermore, by his abstinence from all the baneful pleasures that wreck the constitutions of most Parisians?

On the other hand, life in the provinces slips away peacefully enough, as a rule, but O! how wearing and wasting it is to the hapless soul who lives but in the hope of succeeding to another's estate. Had Gardilanne maliciously intended a cruel form of punishment, he could not have devised a more effectual one than this legacy; he had changed the faïence violin, into a prisoner's ball and chain, as it were, which Dalègre wore, forever dragging heavily at his leg.

In his first excitement, he had redistributed his collection and left a special place for the violin. But this waiting place distressed him; it soon gave him so sharp a pang that he was forced to fill it up with something else, no matter what, that his eyes might not rest upon it.

The time was when he used to snuff up, as a grateful incense, the praises of visitors to his collection, but now this gave him more pain than pleasure, for it only recalled how inferior was his to many others he had seen, and especially to Gardilanne's.

He desultorily continued his search for

rare specimens, and now and then found one; but what district, no matter how rich, can compete with the magnificent opportunities of the auction-room of the Hôtel Drouot, which daily, for eight months in the year, pours out thousands of curiosities, got together from every quarter of Europe.

To keep a little in the movement, Dalègre used to go and dine sometimes at the Hôtel des Voyageurs, where he was likely to meet some of the professional *chineurs*, or bric-a-brac hunters, from Paris. A curious race indeed those *chineurs*! they would make their way with unblushing effrontery into any house, no matter whose; the flustered housewives would put them out of doors; they would return again by the windows, in spite of everything, and rummage the place from cellar to attic. If Dalègre fell in with one of these choice spirits his *ennui* was for the time-being appeased, for the man brought the artistic dust of Paris on his shoes. Dalègre would take him to visit his collection, chatter of faïence without a moment's intermission, and he never failed

to bring upon the carpet the subject of the faïence violin.

The precious instrument acquired a European reputation. One day, Dalègre received from Gardilanne a printed memoir devoted to it, the origin of which was this: A certain Hollander, member of the *Amicitia* Society of Amsterdam, had repaired to Paris to study the celebrated violin. He was a person in whom the national traits of narrowness and bigotry were developed to the last degree, and what must he do, forsooth, but pronounce that this marvel of pottery belonged to the manufacture of Delft.

The Faïence Club was thrown into an indescribable state of ferment by this. The brazen claim had not an iota of evidence to rest upon beyond the discovery of two little crossed hooks, which could be seen through the *ff* holes. The Hollander insisted that these were the especial mark of the Delft potter Bisbroock.

The Club instantly subscribed for the publication of a pamphlet to put the audacious Dutchman back in his proper place. At once, all the champions who had stood

out for Rouen, Niderviller, Nevers, Marseilles, les Ilettes and Sinceny, respectively, as the birth-place of the violin, sunk their local differences and united against the common enemy. The thing of paramount importance was to uphold the honor of France. Was a pretentious snip of a town, because it had caught up some early inspirations from China and Japan—to be allowed to lord it, in the ceramic way, over all Europe? No, so far as pen and ink could do it, Delft was to be wiped off the face of the earth. The sharpest pen at the service of the Club was entrusted with the job, and he set to cutting out work for supercilious Holland, which she would be a long while in attending to.

To the brochure was added a faithful drawing of the violin, together with accurate elevations and sections, so that good judges could determine for themselves whether there was the least connection between its light, elegant design and ornament and graphically executed figures, and the heavier themes usually treated by the potters of Delft. A part of the contents, furthermore, was a learned opin-

ion by an expert of the national manufactory at Sèvres, who reported on an examination he had made of the clay under the microscope, at a certain spot where it was not covered by the glaze. The violin was unhesitatingly ascribed to Nevers.

But it was especially in the controversial and satirical portions that the writer showed at his best. What infinite amusement he got, for instance, out of the craze in Holland for pictorial wall-tiles! After having run through every other known method of displaying them, they even faced up their stables with them, conceiving apparently that if they could only spread enough of those commonplace scenes before the blinking eyes of their cows, lazily chewing the cud on the straw, they could both brighten the existence of their domestic animals and render them yet more tractable.

On reading this pamphlet, Dalègre was at first delighted and then plunged into a profound melancholy. He saw the great increase of popularity that must accrue to the faïence violin; he saw all Europe aroused and rent by the violent

wranglings and quarrels over it. But, then, on the other hand, could an object of such universal interest ever enter quietly into the cabinet of so humble a person as himself? It was far too much to expect; it would be too good to be true.

"Will not Gardilanne forget his promise?" he would anxiously ask himself. "Has he really made his will in my favor? And, even if he has, may he not tear it up, some day, and make a new one of quite the opposite tenor?"

Once more, his life took on its darkened hue; day by day it grew more sombre. Far from having the soothing effect upon the troubled breast that tradition is wont to ascribe to it, music, even the sweet imaginary music of his faience violin only served to multiply and deepen the furrows on his brow. These furrows became regular chasms wherein lurked mental unrest, perplexity, envy, hatred and all uncharitableness.

For alas! yes, it must be told, there were even times when Dalègre found himself desiring the death of Gardilanne; his soul would fill with a guilty ecstasy at

the thought. These collectors are almost without any bowels of compassion.

Yet his evil imaginings never failed to receive due punishment, through the sufferings they brought upon himself. A year after the publication of the pamphlet described, one day, in reading his morning paper, he received a staggering shock much like that which fells the ox in the slaughter-house.

It consisted merely of a couple of lines, in the department of Minor Happenings, but each letter of this couple of lines was charged as with a violent current of electricity. Gardilanne, the news-item stated, had donated his collection to the Cluny Museum.

It went on to say that the Minister of Fine Arts had accepted the gift, arranged to place it in a gallery by itself, and, by way of rewarding Gardilanne for his generous public spirit, had created for him the special post of conservator of his own treasures.

The effect could scarce have been more disastrous had Dalègre burst a blood-vessel. O, the violin! that long-cherished

violin! the very apple of the eye! Was Gardilanne ever likely to withhold from the donation the gem of the entire display and send it down to him? Alas! no, it was never to be thought of.

It was a ticklish subject to treat in writing, yet he felt that he must have some reassurance before the collection should have passed forever beyond his reach and gone to the Cluny Museum.

He finally hit upon the plan of sending his dear old friend a few hypocritical words of congratulation on the magnanimous sacrifice he had made in the cause of art. He offered to join to the donation to the museum some rare pieces of his own, he had lately got, and, moreover, to let them go in as a part of Gardilanne's gift. The truth is that, for the violin, which he saw escaping him, he would have given his whole stock, without an instant's question. As with many another collector too, since the truth must be told, long possession had satiated his interest in what he had amassed, to such a point that it all began to be unmeaning and well-nigh wholly indifferent to him.

Contrary to all expectations, Gardilanne made no reply to the friendly missive, and the failure to reply increased Dalègre's legitimate fears to the utmost. Not a word, not a syllable, of thanks came back to him for his disinterested offer. Could there be more unmistakable proof of the malicious and dishonest intent that was brewing?"

"Not to answer my letter," said Dalègre, "is a clear rupture of relations and a declaration of war. He has no intention of keeping his promise, and he wishes to indicate it openly by this rough, uncivil conduct."

He thought of setting out at once for Paris, to reproach his friend for the sudden destruction of illusions which alone had kept him alive during many years. He would move him to pity for his hapless lot; he would put his finger on the fresh and bleeding wound due to the faïence violin. But the paralyzing reflection gave him pause that he must judge of Gardilanne and other collectors by himself. The journey would be quite useless, he knew, for their hearts were icy cold. He

should find the feelings of Gardilanne covered under a flinty glaze harder than that of his own faïence, and from that glaze, reproaches, criminations, prayers, all alike, would glance off like the most innocuous of arrows.

Shut in his little provincial town, without a horizon, unable to command privacy, dreading compassion, shrinking from prying questions, Dalègre suffered a veritable martyrdom. He could no longer see any relief but in death, and, at night, as the long hours passed without sleep, he used to pray for death to come and deliver him.

But death did not come—at Nevers.

As in both houses the stern reaper heard only of faïence, he mistook the doorway, for he brusquely stepped in at Paris one day, and carried off Gardilanne—before he had had time to install his collection at the Cluny Museum. The famous collector was discovered lifeless in his chair, in the midst of the rich accumulations which looked down upon him from all the surrounding walls.

A dispatch from a notary apprized Da-

lègre of the fact, the same day, and mentioned a legacy devised to him in the will of the deceased.

He set out at once, to be on hand for the funeral. His first visit, however, on stepping from the stage-coach in Paris, was to the notary, to verify the legacy. Was it really the faïence violin that had been left him?

Yes, it was that and nothing less. Gar-dilanne had been true to his promise, and the wondrous violin which had so profoundly troubled his existence was at last his very own.

During the funeral, a single tear stole down his cheek.

Elaborate analysis would have been needed to determine the constituents of that tear, and even then little would have been arrived at, for tears are made up of exceptional materials which are beyond the reach of the science of chemistry, in its present state of advancement.

CHAPTER XIV.



HE violin was not only unique in its kind, but, almost more remarkable still, it was of an absolutely virginal purity in every particular of form and decoration. The fire had not left the faintest flaw upon it. The color nowhere extended by a hair's breadth over the boundary-lines set for it. The piece, being perfect, had therein a value wholly apart from all others. In general, mending, restoration, repainting, varnish substituted for glaze and plaster for clay, and the like, are but too familiar to collectors, who are a race concerning themselves more about appearances than realities.

The bridge, pegs and strings apart, the musical instrument was entirely of faïence. Dalègre kept in mind Gardilanne's prudent care in packing it for transportation, and not to be outdone, after arranging

it with sedulous precautions in its case, he carried it delicately on his knees all the way from Paris to Nevers.

His townsmen inferred from Dalègre's extremely cheerful mien that some unusual piece of good fortune had happened to him. He seemed to have banished dull care henceforth and forever; the death of Gardilanne added ten years to his existence; he was in no respect the careworn person they had lately been sympathizing with, but, on the contrary, his smiling visage was a hearty pleasure to see.

Scarce was he out of the *diligence*, when, after bestowing his treasure in a warm nest of cotton, as tenderly as a mother might have arranged her baby, he hurried about town announcing the news right and left. He seized everybody he met, and invited him to come next day to see the wonderful violin he had snatched from the maw of the egotistical and the all-devouring capital. Henceforth it should ever remain, as of right, in the town that had given it origin.

It was the day for the appearance of

Danel's News-Letter, and Dalègre hastened to find the editor and sat down with him and told him the story of the discovery of the faience violin, its vicissitudes, and how the Paris journals were wild with envy at the loss of it.

Danel listened with his most attentive air, to let the narrative strike profoundly into him. Having heard it, he graciously promised an article, at the head of his local columns, in the forthcoming number. Then he returned to the café, and the interminable games of *piquet* he was always playing, and entertained his company with lamentations on the absorbing nature of the journalist's career, which keeps his poor, hard-worked intellectual powers forever boiling at a fever heat.

Dalègre took care to be at home by four, so as to allow himself ample time to put up the violin in its destined place, that he might enjoy the delightful effect during dinner time.

None who has not studied the collector in season and out of season, can have any idea of all the strangeness that passes through his mind. Do you think, for in-

stance, that any possible arrangement in his museum of curiosities is the result of accident? Not a bit of it. Yonder Chinese pipe is now suspended above a dried Malabar frog. Well and good! it looks very simple, but it was a matter of long and most profound consideration whether, on the contrary, the Malabar frog should not be suspended above the Chinese pipe.

Dalègre, it may be believed, spared no study of that sort in this particular matter. In the first place great care was to be taken that the proper effect of the violin was not stultified by surrounding it with other faïence out of key and keeping. As its scheme of decoration was in quiet monochrome, it was most important that no pieces at all brilliant in color should be placed too near it.

Everything in the apartment must naturally give way to the faïence violin; there was nothing whatever that must not be sacrificed to it without a moment's hesitation. He meant to change the wall-paper, so as to throw out the violin the more effectively upon a background of neutral tone. The marvel must be hung so high that no

careless hand could profane it in passing, and, at the same time, so low that the owner could reach it by mounting a joint-stool, in order to turn it this way and that, and explain all its beauties to an admiring audience.

Six o'clock! and old Marguerite had twice been in to announce dinner. The second time, her master waved her away with as supercilious an air as if he had been rearranging the face of Europe, and she dared not present herself again. He was altering the distribution of his collection, and his heightened color, kindling eye and touzled hair all on end, were but a small indication of the zest he threw into the pursuit.

He had put up the three curious music-plates, in a triangle, above the space prepared for the violin. He felicitated himself on this happy idea of bringing together the violin and old Monsieur de Mondonville's music. Then he wondered whether, perchance, any lady visitor would, some day, be shocked at the rather free words of one of the plates:

“‘*Croyez vous qu'Amour m'attrape?*’”

—he began to hum gayly, then, breaking off, “O! well, collectors must have a little more license than other people,” he muttered.

The little air was really so sweet and charming that a fancy took him, since he had some talent in that direction, to sit down and try it, at once, on the violin. He had not heard the sound of the instrument, as yet, except in his dreams.

Evening was now drawing on. He summoned his domestic, who responded hastily, thinking it was a call at last to serve dinner. But it was with him only question of an ethereal diet of music; her master merely ordered her to bring a lamp.

Marguerite brought the lamp, and retired, complaining that the dinner was now wholly spoiled and that was an end of it. But Dalègre did not bother his head in the least about this, being engrossed with such very different preoccupations.

As he had let down the pegs of the violin on the journey, he now screwed them up again and began to tune, as one would tune up a usual instrument.

When the strings seemed fairly well stretched, he took a bow and tried some chords, but he got only half-choked, smothered tones which showed that something was still out of order. He observed that the bridge was improperly placed. He put it where it belonged; then more screwing up was necessary.

So, there, very good! just a little more —just the le-ee-ast little more!

All of a sudden, crack! crack! a sinister snapping and rending were heard; the faïence violin flew into twenty pieces.

In Dalègre's hand there remained only the wretched stump of the neck. He stood a single moment aghast with terror.

Then he seemed to go raving crazy. In uncontrollable fury, he gave a terrible cry, hurled the stump of the violin straight before him, and then followed this up with a tremendous onslaught upon all the remaining objects of his collection.

His elderly servant flew into the room at the unusual clamor, and what a sight greeted her eyes! She saw her master like one beside himself, his eyes blood-shot, his frame shaken as by convulsions,

while he was striking out on all sides with his sinewy arms, and every sweep of these was followed by appalling disaster.

Marguerite feebly endeavored to restrain him, but he had lost all knowledge of her, he wrestled with her, forced her up against a large cabinet laden with potteries, jammed her hard against it, and over it went with a terrible crash upon the floor.

As it was near the street, passers-by heard the crash and old Marguerite's outcries. They rushed in and the crowds managed to finish under their feet any parts of the collection that remained intact. When Dalègre was finally mastered, not a vestige survived of that mass of precious objects which had been his joy and his pain during five long years of his life.

The fire department hurried to the scene; a little more and the tocsin would have sounded to summon forth the citizen-soldiery to the defence of their hearths and homes. The sensation created by these doings in quiet, uneventful Nevers may well be imagined, and the memory

of it endured for many a long day thereafter.

Danel's News-Letter consecrated plenty of space to the catastrophe. Historians of ceramic art will find numerous most interesting particulars of it, should they care to look up the particular number* containing the account.

The ingenious Danel now gave his hard-worked imagination full swing, to atone for any shortcomings in his technical knowledge of the subject—of which indeed he had not the faintest notion.

His article spoke of Dalègre as “one of the most highly esteemed and foremost of our leading fellow-citizens.”

It said that he had been prostrated by a violent fever, which had at first inspired alarm, but that a skilful practitioner of the city had reduced it to subjection and would now answer for the result, upon his professional reputation. All was going on encouragingly.

We have shown how Dalègre renounced the world and society for a matter of five

* March 15, 1860, No. 9, 1st page, 2d column.

years. But, during all this time he still retained the good will of the people with whom he had once had pleasant social relations; and all of them, with possibly a single exception, were sincerely sorry for him in his present straits. The one exception was Balandrau, the lawyer, who could not resist an opening for one of his sarcasms. Professional wits have little more mercy in their composition than collectors themselves.

Monsieur Balandrau got off, one evening, at the café, this *mot*: “ Dalègre has fallen into *dé-faïence*.” *

* A play upon the word *défaillance*—meaning a swooning-fit or a complete collapse.

CHAPTER XV.



T a month's end, Dalègre, pale and emaciated, awoke as from a baneful dream. It had lasted very long, and in the course of it he seemed to have reviewed, in an interminable series of bizarre tableaux, all the thoughts and doings by which he had been so intensely absorbed during the past five years.

Faïence had personified itself to his imagination in a horrible dragon, which soared over France and laid its claws, at the same time, upon Rouen, Strasbourg, Moustiers, and Nevers, by way of asserting a universal domination. The inhabitants of those cities seemed to be themselves made of faïence. Brilliant and polished, they were nevertheless debarred from any close contact with one another, through fear of injury to their enamelled surfaces. They were cold and selfish, they

could not converse, they lived in an everlasting tiresome apathy, broken only by their one emotion, the fear of the dragon.

Subject, however, to that law by which disputes will arise even in quarters that are apparently the most peaceably disposed, these various towns fought one another, and then a jealous rival, Delft, profited by their discords to impose her yoke upon them all.

Dalègre's strange nightmares went on till, one day, he was cognizant of kindly attentions lavished upon him, of a renewal of strength, of a return to life. Two women were giving him devoted aid, and the younger one did not seem to care to conceal at all the unusually affectionate interest she took in his case. They were his aunt and cousin. They had installed themselves at his bedside, from the first, and they more than any other influence had fought off the demon of insanity, which had threatened, for a while, to hold possession of his overwrought brain for good.

Six months later, Dalègre, completely cured, married his pretty cousin, and he

at once proceeded to become the model of husbands.

The union was blessed with children, and Dalègre looking at the sweet enamel of their eyes, the clear transparency of their complexions, the delicate carnation of their cheeks, would say to his wife:

“What a mere mockery of life, my dear, is that of those poor collectors, engrossed with their paltry trumperies! What idiots they are to deny themselves the pure joys of domestic happiness! They let their capacities for feeling dry up, day by day, and their very souls wither in their bosoms.”

THE END.

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